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OR,
Foiling the Frisco Sharp.

A Story of the Mississippi.

BY HAROLD PAYNE.

CHAPTER I.
A FULL HAND.

"Excuse me, gentlemen. I have something to say in this little game! Just make her fast and shove out that gang-plank again, or some of you will be putting your families to the expense of buyin' crape in about a second!"

"I WILL LASH YOU TO THE SPAR WITH THIS ROPE, AND DO WHAT I CAN TO PADDLE IT ASHORE."

And the crowd that had just rushed aboard of the old Gray Eagle halted in dismay and turned their white faces toward the speaker. And no wonder.

A man had mounted a sugar cask which stood close to the levee, and had them covered with two murderous-looking, six-shooters.

This would have caused this hardy crowd of Mississippi River toughs little uneasiness if the man had been an ordinary mortal.

But when they turned and saw that it was Dan Louis, otherwise the River Sport, or Dead-Shot Dan, a thrill of terror went to the heart of the bravest in that crowd, for they all knew him, either personally or by reputation, and knew that he was peculiar for two things. One was, that when he said a thing he meant it every time, and the other was, he never missed the object he shot at.

The crowd in question, which numbered about twenty, was a hastily organized Vigilance Committee, headed by one Captain Donald Foxen, and they had in their custody a white-haired, benevolent-looking old gentleman and a beautiful young girl of seventeen.

These two people had put up at the Planters' House, St. Louis, a few days previous, representing themselves as father and daughter, and nobody paid any attention to them, except to notice that the old gentleman seemed to have plenty of money, that the young lady was very beautiful, and that they both had the appearance of great respectability.

They occupied adjoining rooms, and all went well until the arrival at the hotel, some days later, of this same Captain Foxen, who, accidentally or intentionally, took a room directly opposite theirs, and the very next morning after his arrival claimed that he had been robbed of a large sum of money and a case of valuable diamonds, amounting in all to several thousand dollars.

The following day the old gentleman and his daughter left the hotel with the intention of taking passage on the Gray Eagle for their home, in Memphis; but, no sooner had they crossed the gang plank when they were surrounded by this mob, whose leader, Foxen, informed them that, inasmuch as they had robbed him, his committee would now take them in charge. He then ordered the crew to haul in their lines and put out into the stream at once.

Dan Louis was also stopping at the hotel at the time, and, accidentally overhearing a conversation between Foxen and a rather tough-looking individual touching this matter, decided to watch him.

Therefore, as soon as he heard that the old gentleman and his daughter had left the hotel, he inquired which way they had gone, and, on learning this, lost no time in making his way to the levee, where he arrived in the very nick of time, for the roustabouts were already letting off the lines and had hauled in the gang-plank.

There was not a second to be lost.

The boat was already too far away from the wharf for Dan to leap aboard, and was still moving away. So he sprang upon the nearest object, which happened to be the sugar-cask, and, leveling his two revolvers upon the crowd, gave the above command.

Foxen hesitated, but did not obey the command, and as he paused to glance at his questioner on the top of the sugar-cask, he instinctively drew his own revolver. This was a signal for the rest of his gang to follow suit, and in less than a second the whole mob stood revolvers in hand.

It was all, in fact, the work of a second, but the instant Foxen's pistol gleamed in his hand, and before he had time to raise it, a sharp report heralded the discharge of one barrel of one of the weapons, and Foxen's revolver went spinning into the air and fell into the water. Dan had shot it out of his hand.

That struck panic to the crowd, especially when some one whispered that the man was the notorious "Dead-Shot Dan, the River Sport."

Foxen was also embarrassed at the moment, but was not long in recovering his self-possession, and then began to consider what was best to be done.

Before he had meditated two seconds, however, a second command from Dan brought him to his senses.

"Draw in that slack and bring her ashore, quick! for I've got a full hand!" was the command, and there was such an air of cool determination about the young sport that Foxen was spared the trouble of giving the order, and the next instant the frightened roustabouts had grasped the cable and were tugging lustily to bring the boat about and swing her up to the wharf again.

"Curse him!" muttered Foxen, when he saw what was taking place. "I wonder what that young jackanapes has to do with this matter, anyway?" And addressing Dan, he demanded:

"What do you want, anyway?"

"I told you what I want," replied the other, coolly.

"But these people are thieves—robbers!" pleaded Foxen. "They have robbed me of everything I have."

"I do not know whether that is true or not," responded Dan, in the same tone as before. "If it is true, you have your redress. There is plenty of law in St. Louis, without resorting to Vigilance Committees. And the fact that you have done so leads me to believe that what you say is not true."

The boat touched the dock and Dan sprang from the elevation with a view to rushing aboard, but whether the thing had been pre-arranged or the action was simply spasmodic, the crowd made a mad stampede for the shore, completely blocking the way and preventing Dan from getting aboard for several minutes. At ten or twenty paces off he was equal to the whole crowd, but when it came to pushing his way through them, it was another matter.

Finally he succeeded in making his way to the deck of the Gray Eagle, after the greater part of the mob had got ashore, and looked about for the old gentleman and his daughter. But they were nowhere to be seen!

The young River Sport was dumfounded. He knew they could not have gone ashore by way of the gang-plank over which he had come aboard, so they must still be on the boat.

Perhaps, fearing some danger from the threatened shooting, they had ascended to the cabin.

At the thought he bounded up the steps to the cabin.

But a thorough search revealed the fact that they were not there.

Then it occurred to him that he had been wasting his time, for he knew Donald Foxen to be as cunning as a fox, and would not be caught napping.

Dan, therefore, hastened down-stairs again and did what he should have done in the first place, made inquiry of some of the crew.

"What became of the old man and his daughter?" he demanded of the first man he came to.

"Oh, dem?" said the darky. "Dey's dun gone wif de tall gemlen in de skiff yander."

And as he spoke the negro pointed to a dark object moving away in the distance, which, by the slanting rays of the just disappearing sun, Dan could see was a skiff containing five people, whom he understood to be the old gentleman and his daughter and Foxen and two of his men who had the others in custody.

"Why did you not tell me in time that they were making their escape?" he thundered at the negro.

"Why, sah, I—I didn't know, sah, dat you'n wanted to—know, sah," faltered the negro, frightened nearly to death.

Dan did not stop to discuss the matter with him. He had business to attend to.

"Here!" he called. "See how quickly you can lower another skiff, and see how well you can pull afterward!"

The roustabout needed no further bidding, but, calling a couple of his mates to his assistance, they soon had another skiff in the water, and two stalwart negroes sat down at the oars, while Dan sat in the stern to manage the tiller.

As the skiff glides through the water in pursuit of the fugitives, let us inquire who the people engaged in this little drama are, so far as we can ascertain at this time.

Daniel Louis, the River Sport, who is to be the star-actor, was a young New Yorker, who had come West some three or four years before to make his fortune, and, like most young men who go toward the sunset with that object, he was a trifle poorer, if anything, than he was the day he reached the West. He had learned a good deal, however, among other things, besides a good deal about human nature; he had learned to be a gambler, at which profession he met with the average luck—was sometimes flush, but often broke. He had also earned the reputation of being the best pistol-shot, both along the Mississippi and in the far West.

A month before this history opens, Dan had struck a streak of luck in the mining-camps, and had rolled up a pretty big wad. But it wasn't quite large enough, as he thought, to go back East and wed "the prettiest girl that ever wore skirts," so he went down to Frisco to increase it. There he met Donald Foxen, a sharp of the worst type, and before he was aware of the gentleman's character, Foxen had beaten him out of the greater part of his money by a skin game, and then suddenly left the hotel where they were both stopping.

Dan soon discovered which way he had gone, and followed. For a long time he had been unable to come up with the rascal, and had only just done so when he found him in the midst of his scheme against the old man and his daughter.

What the gambler's motive could be, in the event of the old man and his beautiful daughter being innocent of the charge he had preferred against them, Dan could only vaguely surmise. But that he had some motive, and a rascally one, the young man was as well satisfied as he was that the father and daughter were innocent.

Under the gigantic strokes of the two powerful negroes the frail little barque skimmed over the water like a prairie hen through the air, and as the darkness gradually closed down upon the great river, deepening the tinge of its murky waters, he was gratified to see that he was gradually shortening the distance between them.

"Pull away, my lads," he said, encouragingly as they spun along. "If we overhaul that craft before they have time to land, I'll give each of you a five dollar gold-piece!"

"Golly!" cried both coons in a breath, "we'll do our bes', boss, to earn dat money."

And their eyes were equally as bright as, and a good deal bigger than, the prospective gold-pieces.

The swarthy giants tugged at the oars more heroically than ever, and sent the skiff shooting along at an increased rate of speed.

The distance between the two skiffs was not more than a hundred yards now, and Dan's heart bounded at the prospect of soon having his enemy in his grasp and of rescuing the defenseless father and daughter.

But just as his hopes reached their highest the fugitives' skiff landed on the Illinois shore and its occupants disembarked.

CHAPTER II.

A CHASE IN THE DARK.

ONLY two or three minutes elapsed after the fugitives landed when Dan also sprang ashore.

But, short as the time was, they had time to get considerable start of him, and as the shore just here was fringed with a thick wood, he at once saw his disadvantage. Still, he was not discouraged, and pressed on.

It soon became so dark, that scarcely an object could be seen, and only for the fact that the young girl had on a white waist or sacque, it would have been utterly impossible to follow the fugitives at all.

"Curse that fellow!" muttered Dan, alluding to the gambler. "I wish he wore something white instead of the girl. I'd soon put an end to this chase. But as it is, it's lucky for me that even she wears something that can be seen in the dark, or—"

Here he stopped—not only soliloquizing, but also stopped walking.

The cause of this was that the white object which had served to guide his progress had suddenly disappeared! Whether it had just occurred to Foxen that the white sacque was too conspicuous a mark and had thrown something over it, or the party had reached a house and gone in, Dan could only conjecture.

He hesitated but a moment, however, and pushed on with all speed, and was nearing the spot, as well as he could judge, where he had last seen the white sacque, when something whizzed past his ear like a bee, followed by a flash and report only a few yards away.

Quicker than lightning Dan had his own pistol leveled in the direction he had seen the flash, but before he pulled the trigger a thought flashed through his mind that caused him to hesitate. The girl! He was as apt to hit her as any one else. Nay, more so. For it would be in exact keeping with the character of the cowardly Foxen to put her between himself and danger.

Dan lowered his weapon, therefore, and instantly moved out of his present range, but was more cautious about making any noise this time, and when he had moved a little way he paused and listened.

For several minutes he stood listening intently, but not a sound could he hear.

He could not understand it. But he soon made up his mind that the fugitives were nowhere near, otherwise they must have made some noise to betray their presence.

And Dan took a few steps forward, when to his surprise, he came plump up against a huge rock or cliff.

This solved the mystery of the fugitives' disappearance. They had evidently gone behind the cliff.

Feeling his way along the face of the rock, Dan moved cautiously along until he came to a sharp angle, and turning which, he found himself once more on the very brink of the river.

Here he paused again to listen, and away off in the darkness above the low murmur of the great river he could hear the sharp click of oars.

There could be no doubt that this was the fugitives.

But what puzzled the River Sport was where they had got the boat.

Evidently the shrewd Foxen had arranged matters in advance. Possibly this was the same boat that they had come over in, and Foxen had left one of his crew in the skiff with instructions to row down the river and meet them at this point. This the gambler would be capable of doing, for Dan remembered hearing him say that he was raised in the vicinity of St. Louis, while he (Dan) was totally unacquainted with the country.

What to do next he scarcely knew.

He cursed himself for a fool that he had not instructed the negroes who rowed him over to pull down and meet him at some point. But as he did not he would be compelled to walk back to where he had left them. And then, as likely as not, he would find them gone.

While he was turning this matter over in his mind, he was suddenly startled by the appearance of a steamer coming round the bend at this point, and almost at the same time, by the glare of her beacon, he saw a skiff pulling toward her.

A moment later, and while he gazed, he saw the steamer reverse her engines and slacken her speed, and, while he could not see what was going on, he had no doubt that the fugitives were taken aboard, for an instant later the steamer was under way again and the skiff was nowhere to be seen.

There was but one course left him now, and he was not slow to resolve upon it.

Without loss of time he hastened back to where he had left the skiff. But as he had more than half expected, it was gone.

This necessitated a walk of five or six miles to the bridge, and another long tramp across to the city, but he accomplished it all, and hastened to the depot, where he bought a ticket for Cape Girardeau, the first point at which the steamer was likely to land.

Although he had to wait nearly an hour for the first train south, Dan arrived at his destination several minutes before the steamer got in, and waited for her at the levee.

As the night was a little cool and raw, as it usually is in that section, Dan sauntered into a saloon near the levee, which looked bright and inviting compared with the chilly fog arising from the river, albeit, from the loud talking he guessed there must be a pretty tough crowd inside.

As soon as he entered the saloon he found his suspicions were correct. But that did not worry Dan. He was used to tough crowds.

No one would have taken Dan for a Westerner or a sport, as he always dressed quietly but neat, and had the appearance of a well-to-do business man. So, the moment he stepped into the saloon, the crowd of ruffians began to eye him suspiciously.

Dan paid no attention to them, but sauntered up to the bar and ordered a drink, which experience in Western life had taught him was a necessary consideration for remaining in the place. He had no more than done so, however, when a big bully with a villainous face, walked up to him and growled:

"I say, pardner, yer ain't er-goin' ter drink alone, I reckon?"

"That depends upon how I feel about it," rejoined Dan coolly.

"Wal, I like that!" snorted the big man, stepping a pace or two away and sizing him up from head to foot. "Say, young feller, d'ye know who yer talkin' to?"

"I haven't the slightest idea, and care less," was the cool response, as Dan raised his glass to his lips.

"Wal, sar, my name is Rusty Dunn, an' I'm a bad man from Bald Knob. I kin lick anything that wears hair an' kin plug a ball truer than any man on the Mississippi!"

"Glad to know you, Rusty," said Dan in a quiet tone. "What will you have?"

"I won't hev nothin' with you, cuss yer!" snarled the big man, springing several feet away and making a motion as if to draw his revolver. "I won't hev nothin' with you, 'cept blood."

With that the big man drew his weapon, but before he had time to raise it on a level with Dan, the latter had raised his own pistol and fired, striking Dunn's weapon a half an inch from where he grasped it, sending it flying out of his hand to the latter's surprise and horror, as well as that of the rest of the crowd, who had gathered in a corner expecting to see some fun at the expense of the "tenderfoot" as they supposed Dan to be.

The big man and his gang stared at Dan in blank astonishment.

The latter returned their gaze with a good-natured smile on his handsome face, and finally said:

"You say you are a crack shot, Dunn, how does that strike you?"

The big man made no reply, but strode over to where his pistol had fallen with a surly air, and picking it up, surveyed it critically for a moment.

He was surprised to see that the sport's ball was wedged in between the barrel and cylinder in such a manner as to prevent the latter from revolving, thus rendering the weapon useless!

One of the best shots in that part of the country, as Dunn was, he could not understand how any man could have accomplished such a feat intentionally, and came to the conclusion that it was a mere accident.

"A lucky shot, eh, Rusty?" put in one of his pals.

"That's what it was—nothin' else," growled the giant, glancing maliciously toward the young man with the revolver. "Any fool's liable to make a lucky shot, but it's another thing to do it a second time."

Hardly were the words out of his mouth when Dan fired a second shot, plugging his ball right beside the first one, and again carrying the weapon out of the astonished Rusty's hand.

Now the crowd *did* stare at the new-comer.

A dead silence reigned for several minutes. Meantime, Dan stood with his back against the bar eyeing the crowd good-naturedly.

Finally a tall, rather fine-looking individual in the crowd strode up to the young man, and extending his hand, while a smile played about his mouth, said:

"Put 'er thar, stranger! I'd like ter be yer friend. If I ain't mistaken, I seen you in Frisco a year or so ago. You ain't Dead-Shot Dan, air ye?"

It was now Dan's turn to be surprised.

"You've struck center, pard," he answered, grasping the stranger's proffered hand. "But you have the advantage of me, although your face seems familiar."

"No, 'tain't likely yer remember me, 'cause I never hed the pleasure of yer acquaintance then. But I seen yer shoot a glass o' whisky outen a feller's hand one night, an' plug the knife outen a Greaser's hand jest as he was about to stab a man, another time. Yer might 'a' heard o' me, though. My name's Marmaduke."

"What?" exclaimed Dan in astonishment. "Not Major Rodney Marmaduke, the king of poker-players?"

"The same, at your sarvice."

"Well, well! I should say I had heard of you. By the way, what are you doing here?"

"Stranded, thet's all. My folks lives hiar, but I wouldn't be in these diggin's ef I hadn't went broke two weeks ago up in St. Louis, an' dropped down hiar ter rusticate. What mought you be doin' down hiar, pardner?"

Dan looked at him and smiled knowingly.

"I have business," he observed. "Important business." And then proceeded to relate his adventure with the gambler, and his attempt to rescue the old gentleman and his daughter from the villain.

"A gal in it, is they?" ejaculated the major, when the young man concluded his narrative. "Jest what I'd expect of you young bucks. But say, yer don't propose ter tackle the hull crowd alone, do yer?"

"I see no other alternative," rejoined Dan.

"Look'e hiar, pard; thet ain't doin' the squar' thing by an ole acquaintance. I don't claim ter handle a gun like yerself, but I kin hit a man the size of Donald Foxen twenty paces, an' not half try."

"Whut's the matter with lettin' me inter this deal?" interposed the big man at this point.

"Well said, Rusty!" cried the major, grasping his hand. "Pardner, you'll never strike a truer friend than ole Rusty nowhere. Shell we j'ine yer?"

"With all my heart," replied Dan. And the three men sealed the compact with "tanglefoot" just as the low, guttural whistle of the boat was heard coming round the bend.

CHAPTER III.

A CHANGE OF PROGRAMME.

"I HAVE an idea, gentlemen," said the River Sport, as the three friends stood on the levee awaiting the arrival of the steamer.

"Whut's thet?" demanded the major.

"Plug the coyote frum the shore?" inter-olated Rusty.

"No. I have been thinking the matter over a little since we've been standing here, and my idea is for us three to take passage on the boat, and I will keep shady for awhile, as Foxen will recognize me if he sees me, and if he's to be got at to-night, you, major, get him into a game of draw. He's loaded to the ground with coin, and I'd like to see you win some of it, or all of it, even if you have to put up a deck on him."

"I wouldn't mind thet a bit," responded the major, shuffling an imaginary deck of cards in his nervous fingers with the instinct of the gambler. "But they's two things ag'in' it. In the fust place, I ain't got a shadder of a stake, an' in the second place, I'm dead down on puttin' up a cold deck on strangers, unless he's crooked hisself."

"Then, you have no excuse whatever," interposed Dan. "For, in the first place, I will stake you, and in the second, you need have no scruples about tricking this chap, for he's as crooked as a ram's horn. Why, nearly every dollar he has in the world he won from me by a low down trick that I did not discover till it was too late."

"Nuff said," gloated the old man, chafing his hands gleefully. "Ef I don't make him sick afore he's dealt a dozen hands, I'm an Injun."

By this time the steamer had rounded in and landed, and the three men went aboard.

Dan turned up his coat-collar and was fortunate enough to get into the cabin without being recognized by any of the crew.

The three men took a state-room together, and Dan went in at once while the major and old Rusty made a tour of the cabin in search of Donald Foxen. But in the course of half an hour they returned to the state-room to report that, while they had made the discovery that the gambler, his pals and the old gentleman and his daughter were on the boat, they had long since retired. So the friends decided to defer the execution of their scheme till morning.

The next morning Dan feigned illness and had his breakfast taken to his state-room, but the keen old major was about, and in the course of the afternoon succeeded in making Foxen's acquaintance, and later of drawing him into a game of draw-poker.

From the major's appearance, Foxen imagined he had a regular snap, for he took him for some backwoods jay who thought he knew the game and had a lot of money to throw away.

The major allowed him to continue in this way of thinking for some time, and Foxen, with the idea of drawing the old mossy-back further in, allowed him to win a good deal at first, but finally the wily gambler got tired of this sort of business and decided to swoop down on the old farmer, as he considered the major, for his whole pile.

He therefore waited till it came his deal, when he gave the major a hand consisting of four kings, thinking, of course, that he would bet his last dollar on such a hand.

And he was right in his conjecture. The major did put up all the money that Dan had given him as a stake, it being every penny the young man had in the world, and the few hundred dollars the major had won in the beginning of the game.

Foxen smiled complacently, for he knew, or thought he knew, that he would soon have the old man's last dollar.

Finally when the last dollar was put up, the major affected to be very nervous, and then the gambler called out:

"Well, partner, what have you got?"

The major, with trembling hand, affected for the occasion, put down his four kings, but managed to conceal the fifth card in his hand.

Foxen thought nothing of this, as he knew he held the four highest cards in the deck anyway, and the fifth card in the major's hand was of no consequence, no matter what it was, so the gambler smiled a little more complacently as he laid down his own hand, and, without taking the trouble to look at his cards, proceeded to rake in the pot.

"Hold on!" yelled the major, clutching the gambler's hand. "What air yer doin' it on?"

The gambler coolly withdrew his hand from the stack of gold and bills and taking up his cards, smilingly proceeded to spread them out for the major's inspection.

The next instant the color left Foxen's face and he ground his teeth.

"Hell and fury!" he muttered.

And no wonder.

There were but three aces in his hand and two small cards, whereas he imagined he had four aces.

The gambler was nonplused.

He did not know what to make of it.

He had been beaten at his own game, but had not the least idea how it was done.

But when he gave himself the four aces he was so confident that he was playing with a greenhorn that he failed to notice the old major when he filched one of the aces out of his hand and substituted another card for it, and now he noticed with horror, that the supposed greenhorn held four kings and an ace, making the highest hand possible in the deck.

Foxen glowered at his opponent an instant, and then roared out:

"It's a put-up job! I won't stand it!"

And he jumped to his feet and drew his revolver.

But before he had time to use it, if such was his intention, a sharp report rung through the cabin, and the weapon sailed into the air like a boomerang.

The astonished gambler turned his gaze in the direction from which the shot had come, but could see no one. The next instant his cheek was ashen.

"Great Heaven!" he cried, in very terror.

"If I did not know that Dead-Shot Dan was dead, I would swear that that was he that fired that shot. He is the only man who could do that. But—"

Here he became silent, and his limbs trembled under him.

Like all gamblers, he was superstitious, and he evidently believed that it had been Dan's ghost that had fired that shot, for he was under the conviction that he had killed the young man when he fired at him in the woods.

Meanwhile the major had scooped the money from the table and was busily engaged in stowing it away about his clothes.

Recovering himself somewhat finally, Foxen turned from the contemplation of the supposed ghost, and, seeing what the major was at, it excited his wrath. But, as the major now held a revolver in a position in which it could be readily utilized should occasion offer, this, together with the gambler's dread of the imaginary ghost, kept him from any very violent demonstrations.

He ground his teeth and muttered a string of horrible oaths as he watched the major coolly, smilingly raking off the biggest part of his (Foxen's) wealth, and finally, unable to contain himself any longer, he cried:

"By Heaven! You can't do that again!

I must have my revenge, and curse me I don't show you a trick worth two of that this time!"

"In other words, yer wanter play me another game, do yer?" observed the major, in a quiet voice.

"I do," snapped the gambler, hotly.

"All right, pard," drawled the major. "I'll go yer one, ef I lose. But mind yer eye, hoss-fly, and don't try no game on the old man, fer he ain't no sich er fool es you think he is. He's been playin' keerds fer quite a spell now, an' knows several o' the tricks."

"Sit down if you want to play," retorted the gambler sharply. "Let us have an end of your palaver."

With that he picked up the pack of cards and began to shuffle them nervously.

"Hold on a bit, pard," put in the major. "I reckon we'd better hev some new keerds this time. Ye've got them ones down too tarnal fine. 'Sides, it's my deal."

"Just as you say," growled the gambler, and calling one of the cabin-boys, ordered a new pack of cards.

When the old man took the fresh pack in his hands and began to shuffle them, he said:

"Now, pardner, is it ter be a squar' game this time?"

"Yes, square game" growled the gambler.

"All right then, I won't mark the keerds, and say, pardner, s'pose you make up yer mind that way too. 'Cause if yer try it, that thar ghost might let drive at yer ag'in, only it mightn't be satisfied with shootin' yer gun away, an' might take a fool notion ter plug yer in the think-box."

Foxen made no reply to this harangue, but watched the major deal the cards in gloomy silence.

The major had given him a good hand on purpose, but to his surprise, Foxen did not bet very high, and as he himself had taken an inferior hand, the gambler won whatever there was up. And if he suspected that the major was drawing him on, he did not evince it. In fact, his demeanor was dogged and sullen for some time.

Finally it came to Foxen's deal again, and something told the major that he was about to perpetrate one of his tricks, and kept his eyes on the gambler sharply.

The old man did not detect him in the act of committing any trickery; but when he got his own hand he found that it contained three aces and one king, and he got another king in the draw completing an excellent full hand.

The major was sharp enough to know that this meant one of two things: either the gambler was playing a desperate game of bluff or he held four of a kind of some small denomination, it mattered not what. Any four of a suit would beat a full hand.

The major affected to be delighted with his hand, and this threw the gambler off the scent, and he began to bet up high.

The old man covered and raised him every time and it was not very long before Foxen was getting to the end of his pile and his excitement increased correspondingly.

Finally he had put up his last dollar, which included a case of jewels worth several thousand, and called the major.

The latter threw down his hand, when to the gambler's unutterable surprise and horror, four aces turned up, while Foxen only held four five-spots.

The gambler grew as white as a corpse and glanced quickly at his own hand again.

He expected to see there one ace, which would have proven the major to be a swindler, but to his astonishment, the card was a deuce.

Nevertheless, although he could not prove it, he knew that he had been tricked, and sprung to his feet livid with rage, and drawing a long knife, was in the act of plunging it into the major, when another report rung

But and the knife, like the pistol, spun away from his grasp.

At the same instant the major, who had been too slow before, leveled his revolver at the gambler's breast as he drawled:

"Better take it quiet, pardner. Skin gamblers ain't got no more right to kick than anybody else. Take a walk."

"Curse you!" muttered the gambler, and strode away.

"Sarved him right," laughed old Rusty as the fellow moved away.

CHAPTER IV.

A COUNCIL OF WAR.

"BEAUTIFULLY done," exclaimed the River Sport a few minutes later, when the major returned to the state-room and emptied his pockets upon a table for his companions' inspection. "And now that we have got the rascal's money, there is nothing in the way of rescuing the old gentleman and his daughter."

"Especially the darter, eh, Dead-Shot?" laughed the old major. "I kin see whut's in your mind 'most as plain es ef yer hed a winder in yer breast."

"You only imagine you can," retorted the young man sharply, coloring a good deal nevertheless. "The fact is, I have no more interest in that young lady than any right-minded man should; and as for any feeling of sentimentality, I never thought of such a thing."

"Thet's all right," said the major, dropping a good deal of his taunting tone. "But its jest as nat'ral fer er young feller ter feel sympathetic towards a gal es it is fer an Injun ter love whisky, and they's no harm into it, nuther, an' I wouldn't be ashamed of it if it was me, an' I'll be switched ef I'd git riled over it noway."

"You're right, old partner," rejoined Dan in a better natured tone. "I was too quick. Especially with you, who have been so good a friend just when I wanted a friend the worst. Forgive me, old man."

"Sartain," cried the old major, grasping his hand warmly.

"However, I wish you to understand that I know nothing about this girl, beyond the fact that she appears to be in trouble—I do not even know her name."

"How d'ye know, then, thet she's in trouble?"

"I overheard a conversation between this fellow and one of his pals, in which they planned this abduction of the girl, under pretense that she and her father were thieves."

"The black-hearted vilyun!" snorted old Rusty, who had remained silent up to that time. "We orter plug the rascal fer luck."

The old major was silent and thoughtful for some moments, but at length he raised his head and drawled:

"I tell yer, Dead-Shot, seems ter me thar's somethin' kinder funny 'bout this business, arter all. You think this critter's abductin' the ole man an' his gal. Wal, mebbe so. But don't it strike yer a trifle queer thet they go 'long so gentle? Pears ter me thet a man an' a gal as didn't wanten go would be a little skiftish."

"I have thought the same thing myself, major," responded the young man, thoughtfully. "Especially when they were in St. Louis and could have called an officer. But of course, the rascal took them by surprise after they got aboard of the boat, and that about dark, so that it may be that they were too much overcome with fright or panic to even call for help. And as for the present, it may be that this fellow, who is very slick-tongued, has succeeded in coercing them into silence either by promises or threats, till he gets them away to some spot where he can do as he likes with them."

"So, yer don't take no stock in the story 'bout them robbin' him?" interrogated the major.

"Not the slightest."

"Nuther do I, me boy. An' besides thet, I'll tell yer whut I b'lieve."

"Well?"

"I b'lieve, fu'st of all, thet the old gent hes a bar'l o' gold somewheres, and that coyote is arter it, an' by some hook or crook he's got the ole chap under his thumb so's he daren't open his lips. 'Nuther thing, I b'lieve he's stuffin' the old gent with the notion thet he's his only friend, while everybody else, especially you, is ag'in' him an' dead bent on killin' him."

"I'm bettin' ten ter one that the major's struck the winnin' keerds this trip," interposed old Rusty.

"Yes, your theory is a good one," assented Dan. "And that accounts for the whole mystery. But we must make some sort of a move to ascertain the facts. First of all, we must find out what room they occupy, and whether the girl and her father are in the same room with Foxen."

"Jest leave thet ter me," put in the major. "I'll find out in a jiffy, fer I know the steward."

"All right, you go and find out, and Rusty and I will remain here till you come back."

The major went away, and in the course of half an hour came back to report that Foxen and his two pals occupied one state-room while the old gentleman and his daughter occupied another adjoining it, and that the gambler and his pals kept a strict watch upon the latter.

"The first thing to be done, then," observed Dan, "is to lay the case before the captain of the boat and obtain his permission to act. In that way we will run no risk of being molested by the crew or of having them assisting the rascals when it comes to the pinch."

The major and Dan sought an interview with the captain at once, and he was greatly surprised to learn that anything of the kind had been going on on his boat, and was, in fact, loth to believe it. He knew that the old gentleman and his daughter had been brought aboard the boat as prisoners, but understood that Foxen was a detective and was taking them South on a requisition from the Governor of Missouri.

"If he is a detective," interposed Dan, "he can probably show you his authority. Has he done so?"

"No, I never thought to ask to see his authority," admitted the captain. "I merely took his word for it."

"Then be good enough to treat us in the same way, and allow us to investigate the matter. If we discover that there are any well-grounded charges against these people, or they are going with him of their own free will, we shall not molest them. But if we find that this man is up to any foul game—"

"In that case," interrupted the captain, growing interested in the young man's story, "I shall be only too glad to assist you in rescuing them and bringing the villain—if such he proves to be—to justice. Yes, you have my consent to investigate the matter as much as you like."

"Thank you, captain," responded the young man. "I trust we shall make no trouble for you and your crew. We will try to avoid it."

With that he took his leave and he and the major returned to their state-room.

It was now late in the evening, and the best time in the world to carry out their plans.

"This is going to be rather a ticklish job," said Dan. "We will not be able to see the old man and learn the fact as long as Foxen and his pals are watching him, and we have no legal right to rush in upon them until we have some evidence that they are guilty of what we think they are."

"Thet is kinder puzzlin'," rejoined the major, reflectively. "Ef I hedn't got the

coyote down onter me fer cleanin' him out, I might go in and git him interested in another game o' draw; but I reckon he wouldn't care ter tackle me any more, even if he hes a stake, which isn't likely arter whut I pulled outen him."

"No, we will have to try some other scheme. I think I have it," he resumed, after a pause. "It is evident, from what you told me, that Foxen thinks he killed me when he fired at me in the woods, and that he firmly believed it was my ghost that fired at him this afternoon in the cabin. So, my plan is this. I will rub a little flour on my face, put a sheet around me and pay him a visit. You two can keep close to my heels, and when I get the door open and him properly frightened, you can rush in and help me to buck and gag the three pirates. Of course, if we find on investigation that they are innocent, it will be an easy matter to release them and apologize for our mistake."

"Thet's the idea exactly," cried the major, enthusiastically. "An' it's my opinion thet we'll not hev no apologizin' ter do."

"Mine too," chimed in old Rusty.

Without further parley, Dan proceeded to make himself up as a ghost and his two companions overlooked their revolvers and procured some bits of rope, and then, when everything was quiet about the cabin and nearly everybody had retired, Dan, followed by the major and old Rusty, made his way to the state-room occupied by Foxen and knocked at the door.

There was no response, and he rapped again.

"Who's there?" came a stentorian voice from within.

"The captain," replied Dan, imitating that official's voice.

"What d'yer want?" came from within.

"I want to see Mr. Foxen at once," said Dan, still in the captain's voice. "The boat has to be tied up at the first landing, which we will reach in a few minutes, and I want to transfer you to another packet which will pass at about the same time, if you prefer continuing on your journey to lying on board a stationary boat for a week."

There was the sound of voices in discussion inside, mingled with a good deal of grumbling, and finally the door was opened a little way by one of Foxen's pals.

As soon as he caught sight of Dan's face, the fellow uttered a groan of terror and was about to close the door again, when old Rusty, with more presence of mind than any one who knew him would have given him credit for, threw his great giant body against the door and held it open.

The next instant Dan glided inside, closely followed by his companions.

The three men had retired and were entirely unprepared for this visit, the only one that was on his feet being the fellow who had opened the door.

There was sufficient light in the room furnished by the lamps in the cabin, to distinguish the outlines of a man, and render Dan's ghastly face more horrible than if it had been lighter.

The two men who were still in bed, Foxen and one pal, were too badly frightened to even get up, and the major and Rusty pounced upon them and had them bound hand and foot before they realized what was going on.

In the mean time Dan had throttled the man who was on the floor, and soon had him overpowered so that his companions had no trouble in binding him when they had finished with the other two.

They then slipped a gag into each of their mouths to prevent them from making an outcry, and then, closing the door and locking it from the outside, were ready for the investigation.

"The first thing to be done," remarked Dan, "is for me to get back to the state-

room and remove this ghostly make-up, otherwise I will surely frighten the girl to death."

He returned to his state-room, and soon came back with his natural face and apparel.

"Now, major, you and Rusty go round to the outside door and prevent them from escaping in that direction, in case they should attempt it, and I will go in from the cabin."

"It's funny yer didn't think o' thet when we was enterin' the gambler's room," suggested the major.

"I knew it wouldn't be necessary," said Dan. "I was quite sure that my ghostly make-up would paralyze those chaps so badly that they would never think of trying to escape."

"An' you was right," chuckled old Rusty. "I never see nobody as bad skeered as them fellers was."

His two friends then took their departure, and when he considered that they had had about time to get round to the other door, Dan, with a throbbing heart, rapped at the door of the state-room that contained the young lady and her father.

CHAPTER V.

A FRIGHTFUL APPARITION.

As had been the case at the door of Foxen's state-room, Dan, the River Sport, was compelled to repeat his knock not once, but two or three times, before he received any response.

Finally, however, a timid voice, which he recognized as that of the young lady, demanded what he wanted.

Being put to the end of his wits for a reply, the young man repeated substantially the same story that he had told Foxen's pal.

Dead silence followed for some moments, and then the door was opened a few inches and a face which Dan recognized as that of the old gentlemen, peered cautiously out.

Upon seeing that it was not the captain, the old gentleman was on the point of closing the door again.

But Dan was too quick for him.

Indeed, it was the only thing that could be done.

And in spite of the old man's struggles and protests, the young man grasped the door and forced it further open, and finally succeeded in forcing his way into the room.

The old man was too badly frightened to cry out, especially when Dan presented his revolver to his breast and told him to keep quiet if he wanted to save his skin.

"I do not want to hurt you," observed Dan reassuringly, as soon as he got the old gentleman sufficiently calmed to listen to reason. "On the contrary, I have come to assist you."

"What do you want?" murmured the old man in a voice tremulous with fear.

"I want to rescue you from the clutches of the man who has you in charge," rejoined Dan in a kindly voice. "He, as I understand it, is carrying you away under the pretense that you robbed him in St. Louis, which charge is false, and he has some other motive in view. What it is, you can doubtless tell better than anybody else. Now, sir, please tell me your whole story, whether the charge which he has preferred against you is true or not, and if not, what his probable motive is for carrying you and your daughter off."

As Dan spoke he took his eyes off the old man's frightened face long enough to glance about the room in search of the young girl, and was surprised to see that she did not appear to be there.

This puzzled him.

There did not appear to be any hiding-place in the cramped state-room where a human being could be stowed away, and yet she was nowhere in sight.

After a moment's hesitation, during which the old man glanced about nervously as though in search of some way of escape, he finally said in an almost inaudible voice, but with a beseeching tone:

"No, no, no, sir, you are entirely mistaken. Mr. Foxen has no evil design against my daughter and myself. He is our best friend and is protecting us from designing people who persist in following us, with what design I know not. Certainly nothing good."

This was a complete set-back for the young man.

There was so much earnestness, candor in the speaker's tone that Dave was utterly unable to decide whether he thought he was telling the truth or was merely speaking under the pressure of coercion and fear.

There was one thing that assisted him materially in his dilemma, and that was the major's prophecy that Foxen had made the old man believe that he (Foxen) was his best friend. This appeared to be the best solution of the mystery, and Dan saw that the only thing to be done was to convince the old man of his error.

"My dear sir," he began, "I understand why you still uphold this villain who, if let alone, will be the ruin of both you and your daughter. He has coerced you into it. You are afraid to speak. Now, let me assure you that I am your friend and will protect you with my own life, if necessary, and you need have no fear of speaking out, as Foxen is at this minute as helpless as an infant, both he and his pals. Moreover, let me tell you that I have nothing to gain in the matter, and only desire to see justice done."

To Dan's surprise, instead of answering directly, the old man tottered across the room to where a lamp was hanging and removing the chimney, ignited the wick. Then turning toward the young man again, examined his face critically for some moments.

At length he said:

"Are not you the young man who came down to the boat just as were putting out and commanded the crew to stop; and also shot the pistol out of Mr. Foxen's hand?"

"I am," returned Dan, somewhat surprised at the question.

"I thought so," continued the old gentleman. "Then you are the person, above all others, whom he warned me against." And the old man gave Dan a look that indicated plainer than words the horror with which he regarded him.

Dan was in a quandary what move to make next.

It was plain that he should never be able by ordinary logic to uproot the impression planted in his mind by this smooth-tongued schemer.

Consequently something else must be tried.

Again he looked for the missing girl, now that there was a light, and was soon convinced that she was not in the state-room.

What could it mean?

Was it possible that she had not come aboard after all, but had been concealed somewhere in the wood?

This theory seemed plausible, especially as he had not seen her since coming aboard, and he had it on the end of his tongue to ask her father; but a little reflection decided him to wait a little while.

"Are you aware, sir," he finally resumed, "that this man Foxen has charged you with robbing him of a great sum of money and valuable diamonds?"

To Dan's surprise, instead of replying, the old man hung his head in a manner calculated to show that he was guilty of the crime.

"Of course the charge is false?" demanded Dan.

Still the old man hung his head and remained silent.

Dan also remained silent for some moments, hoping that he would speak, but as time went on, and there appeared no likelihood that he would reply to his question, the young man finally said:

"Well, sir, there is no use of playing 'possum with me. I came here with the determination of getting at the bottom of this affair and I am going to do it."

The young man had uttered these words with such energy and so utterly unlike his ordinary mild tone, that the old man was startled and looked up at him in a half-frightened and half-surprised manner, but still did not speak. The young man, after a pause in which to note the effect of his words continued:

"Either you are guilty of that crime, or you are not, sir. If you are guilty, the proper authorities have a right not only to know about it, but should have you in custody. If you are innocent, then this man whom you believe to be your friend, is blackening your character and that of your daughter for some wicked purpose. What that purpose is I have no present means of knowing; but there is one thing I will do. I will act upon your confession to me. If you admit that you are guilty I will turn you over to the authorities at the very first landing where there is a magistrate; but if you protest your innocence, I will still keep you under my charge and protect you until I get this fellow where he is not likely to do you any more harm. Now, sir, which is it—innocent or guilty?"

For a long time after the question died away on the young man's lips the older one still remained silent. But he finally raised his head slowly until his eyes rested on the young man's face, and then began in a low, tremulous voice:

"What Mr. Foxen says, I am sorry to say, is true. I am guilty. My greatest regret is that Mr. Foxen should have divulged the secret, thus bringing ignominy upon my child through my crime. As the money and gems were returned to him, he promised to keep the secret inviolate, and for my daughter's sake, protect me from the law until we should reach our Southern home. As it now is, however, I presume you will have to take me in charge and turn me over to the authorities."

"Unfortunately, that is true, sir," responded Dan, still keeping up the ruse, although he still did not believe that the old gentleman was guilty. "Likewise your daughter, as Foxen says she is also guilty or accessory."

"My God!" cried the old man in despair. "Does he also say that? Believe me, sir, she is not guilty. It was I alone who committed the crime. My daughter knew nothing about it!"

"That I can easily believe, sir. But tell me, how came you to rob this man? You have plenty of wealth of your own, have you not?"

"Oh, do not ask me, sir. All I can say is, that I am guilty and am willing to suffer punishment for it. But do, please, try to save my poor, innocent daughter."

"I certainly will, if it is within my power. But where is your daughter? I thought that she was in the same state-room with you."

The old man cast his eyes about nervously especially toward the back door.

"I do not know—now," he murmured almost inaudibly.

"She is aboard the boat, is she not?"

"I—I hope so," he little more than whispered. Then all of a sudden he looked up as if by inspiration. "Where is Mr. Foxen?" he asked in an anxious, nervous tone.

"He is where he will not molest you again."

"What do you mean?"

"I can tell you no more at present." But seeing that the old man was burning with curiosity or anxiety, he finally added: "At

least until you are willing to trust me to the extent of telling me the truth about this matter."

The old man's countenance underwent a series of rapid changes. At one moment it lit up with a gleam of hope and it looked for an instant as though he were about to divulge the truth about this mysterious affair, but the next instant it darkened again with a cloud of despair, as though he had closed his soul and locked it.

At length, finding that the old chap was not likely to change his mind for the present, and desiring to discover, if possible, the whereabouts of the girl, Dan arose to go.

"Well, sir," he said, as he took the key from the door preparatory to locking the old gentleman in, "I will take the liberty of keeping you safe in your room until we reach the next landing, which will not be long, however."

The young man then strode out, leaving the old gentleman in a state of mingled surprise and despair.

He did not lock the back door, as his companions were guarding that, besides he wanted to give the young lady an opportunity of returning if she desired.

When he reached the other side of the boat, Dan was astonished at the state in which he found the major and old Rusty. They were standing there clutching the railing for support, their faces as white as those of the dead and their eyes staring wildly at the rear door of the state-room Dan had just left.

"What on earth is the matter?" demanded the young man.

It was several minutes before either of them could utter a word, but upon being urged and threatened, the major finally gasped:

"There, there! Out of that door! Ghost!"

"Yes, real ghost, Dead-Shot!" reiterated old Rusty. Real ghost!"

CHAPTER VI.

A DOUBLE SURPRISE.

So badly frightened were old Rusty and the major that it took a good while to bring them to their senses enough to get them to their state-room, and once there, it took quite a while longer to bring them round sufficiently to enable them to tell what had happened to frighten them so terribly.

By dint of patience, however, Dan finally managed to get them to talk rationally.

"Why, yer see," began the major in a tremulous voice, "jest as me an' Rusty thar got roun' in front o' the door, it opened, an' as we didn't happen ter be lookin' squar' at it at the time, we kinder thought it might be the old chap er-tryin' ter make er sneak enter yer, an' both on us made a rush at the person as was comin' out, an' got right atop of 'em afore we noticed what it was, when all of a sudden I heard Rusty kinder groan and say 'Oh, Lordy! whut's thet?' an' then I looked up, an' by jingo! I-like ter fainted when I seen it!"

"What?" demanded the young man, unable to keep a straight face.

"The ghost!" replied the major, with bated breath.

"The fiddlesticks!" replied Dan, in disgust.

"Thet's right," put in old Rusty. "Real ghost. No humbug!"

"Come, I'm positively ashamed of you," cried the young man. "Men of your age and experience talking about ghosts."

"Wal, then, I'd like ter know whut it was," said the major. "If it wasn't a ghost, it was somethin' as looked mighty like one."

"How do you know? Have you had much acquaintance with these airy night prowlers, major?"

"No, but it looked jest like pictur's I've seen of 'em."

"Come, tell us 'all about it," demanded Dan, in a firm voice. "Rest assured it was no disembodied spirit, although I am willing to believe that it was the young lady making her escape, probably in her night-robe, for she was not in the room when I got in there."

"Is thet so?" cried the major in a crushed tone, and he glanced significantly at old Rusty.

The latter's jaw dropped.

"Wal, I'll be blamed!" he finally drawled.

"D'yer reckon that it was her, major?"

"If it was, I'm a cussed ole fool, thet's all," growled the major. "Fer I'd 'a' swore 'twas a ghost, an' cuss my cats ef I don't half b'lieve it was, er the whitest mortal I ever laid eyes enter."

"The girl is fair," explained the young man. "And besides, I presume she was frightened at the time. But there are two more things I want to do before we allow any more time to slip by. One is to find what has become of the girl, and the other is to release Foxen and his pals, on the express condition that they will go ashore at the first landing."

"Better wait till she lands afore yer take a cord offen them ducks," suggested the major.

"Certainly, I won't release them right away, but I will see whether the fellow will agree to the proposition or not."

"Yer kin jest gamble he will," muttered the major. "But carryin' it out's another thing. My opinion is, he'll go ashore if he hes a six-shooter at the back of his head, an' not a minit before."

"You're shoutin', major," put in old Rusty. "That chap's layin' low fer mast, an' he ain't er-goin' ter move till he's plugged. Oh, how I'd like ter plug the son of a gun!" and he tapped the hilt of his pistol affectionately.

"Well, come on," interposed Dan. "Let us get to business. You fellows skirmish round and see if you can run across the girl any place while I call upon my dear friend Foxen."

And without further talk, Dan left his companions to carry out their part of the work, while he made his way directly to the state-room of Foxen.

As he had locked both doors of this state-room, the young man had no thought of anything but to unlock the door and walk in, which he did without delay.

But the moment he got inside he paused. He was surprised at the sight which met his gaze.

There was a double surprise for him, in fact.

In the first place the men whom he had left tied an hour before were no longer there.

And in the second place, the young girl whom he had missed from her father's room, and whom he had sent the two old chaps to hunt, *was* there.

And she sat there as complacently as though she had been there all along.

There appeared to be but one solution of the mystery, and that was that the girl had come to the men's rescue and unbound them. This would seem to indicate that she was, after all, in perfect sympathy with the gambler.

The young man was dumfounded. He did not know what to do for some moments.

"Do you know, miss, what became of the three men who were in here a moment ago?"

"I do not, sir," she replied as coolly as though she had told only the simple truth.

"Dan was more puzzled now than ever. He was also disgusted, for if this answer was any indication of the girl's character, he concluded that he had risked his life in a very poor cause.

"Were they not in here when you came in?" he ventured to ask further.

"No, sir," was the cool rejoinder. "There have been no men in here to-night."

Dan was floored. If she had been a man, he thought, he would have argued the point with him in vigorous terms, but what was the use of wasting time with a girl?

He strode out of the room in disgust.

When he met Rusty and the major a little later, they had scoured the boat from stern to stern, without finding the girl.

"No need of searching any longer," observed Dan dejectedly. "I have found the girl, but the men have gone."

"Found the gal!"

"Men gone!" cried each in turn in an excited tone.

Dan told his story in as few words as possible, and at the conclusion, said:

"I've put in nearly twenty-four hours and risked my life twice, and you have lost about twelve hours, all for nothing. I'll tell you what I begin to think."

"Whut's thet?" asked the major.

"I believe," observed Dan, "that the woman is into it as thick as Foxen himself."

"Pears ter me thet ye'r' about right thar, boy," grunted the major. "Tell yer whut I think. I think thet thar gal's done stole the money from the gambler, an' then her dad, like an ole fool, shouldered the blame ter save her repertashun. Men is awful foolish when they have purty darters. I knowed a feller up our way, named—"

"Never mind about the feller up your way," interrupted Dan impatiently. "Let us see whether we can find these men or not. If not, I propose to get off at the first land and gave up the chase."

"Hullo! Whut's thet?" cried old Rusty suddenly, pointing off up the river.

"Wal, it looks ter me like er skiff with three men in it," responded the major.

"That's what it is," observed Dan. "And I'll bet a hundred to one that it is Foxen and his pals."

"Thet's whut," remarked the major. "Whut shall we do 'bout it? Git er skiff an' put off arter 'em?"

"No, let them go. My only proposition to them was to be for them to go ashore and not molest these people any more. And now I wouldn't care much if they had taken them along with them."

"Oh, don't be too hard on the gal," pleaded old Rusty. "She may be all right arter all. An' jest as sure es she looks at yer with them black eyes o' hern, you'll be ready ter swear she's an angel of light an' beauty."

Dan did not reply to this, but put off for his state-room rather sulkily, for him, determined to get a few hours of sleep, although it was now nearing daylight.

He did not undress, however, and after he had lain there on his bunk for a long time, he discovered that he could not sleep.

There was too much on his mind, and an image—that of the beautiful girl—was continually before him; and she appeared to plead her innocence of anything of which she had been charged. Again and again the young man strove to dismiss the image. It would not go, and he finally decided to investigate the matter still further, now that the men were gone.

He was up early the following morning, and came out on deck just as the boat was putting in at one of the way-landings.

There was a railway station at the place, and the young man watched the few passengers who went on or off very closely, more than half expecting to see Foxen and his friends.

But to his relief the boat finally pushed out again without any of them putting in an appearance.

He was just turning away from the guards to return to the cabin, when a pair of roguish black eyes met his own and caused him something of a thrill, such as he had never experienced before.

A little closer inspection showed him that

the eyes belonged to the young lady. She too had been looking for the fugitives, evidently.

He was about to turn away without any further notice of her, when she half smiled, and then beckoned him to her.

She was standing in her state-room, the one in which her father had been, and merely put her head out as she looked.

As soon as he was near enough for them to speak, the girl said:

"You didn't see anything of them, did you?"

There was something of a taunting spirit in her tone, he thought, and it piqued him; and although he knew perfectly well whom she referred to, he affected not to, and asked simply:

"Whom?"

"Mr. Foxen and his friends," she replied.

"No, miss, I did not," he retorted rather sharply. "And what is more, I hope I never will."

"In that respect we are of the same mind," she said, smiling. "I hope I shall never see them again. But I fear that I shall."

CHAPTER VII.

A PATHETIC STORY.

DAN was greatly astonished at the girl's last remark.

Up to that moment he had supposed that she was leagued in some way with this unprincipled gambler.

But her remark seemed to indicate that, now he was gone and she was no longer under his control, she had regained her courage sufficiently to express her dislike for him.

The young man was too much embarrassed at first to express himself, but after a few moments he recovered his self-possession enough to say:

"Why, miss, I should have thought that you would have been glad to see them."

"That is because you neither know me nor my experience with this man Foxen," she rejoined, with an arch expression that was very puzzling to the young man.

He was silent for a few moments again, and for the life of him he could not raise his eyes from the floor.

At length he screwed his courage up once more and continued:

"Then, why did you release them last night?"

To his surprise and discomfiture, she burst out laughing.

"Why, don't you see, for the very reason that I wanted to get rid of them. When I left my father's room, it was not because you were coming in, sir, but because I thought it was he. After I left the state-room I walked about the deck for some time, until the two men whom I had seen in front of our state-room had disappeared, and then I started to return to my father. But just as I was passing the room in which Mr. Foxen had been I heard groans.

"I tried to open the door, but found it locked. Then I went and got the key to the outside door of our state-room and with it unlocked his door, when I found the three men bound and gagged.

"My first impulse was to leave them so, but Mr. Foxen made signs for me to take the gag out of his mouth, and thinking that he had something to say to me, I finally complied with his request. As soon as he could speak he told me that if I would release him and his friends they would leave the boat at the first opportunity and that he would never trouble me any more. I then released them, and, whether it was from a desire to be truthful for once in his life or fear of you, he kept his word. Indeed, he did not wait for a landing, but had the skiff which he had brought aboard at St. Louis lowered and they escaped in that. I fully expected to see him come aboard again at

the last landing, and that is why I was watching."

The River Sport was silent for a little while after this recital, but finally asked:

"Would it be asking too much, miss, to inquire how this man managed to get you in his power in the first place?"

She did not answer immediately, but hung her head, colored a little and appeared about as much embarrassed as Dan had been a little while before.

At length, however, she raised her head and said in a low, confidential tone:

"You have been kind to us, sir, and I can see that you are a gentleman. Therefore, if you care to hear our story, and will kindly step inside, my father will tell you all about our troubles since we first knew this man."

The young man made no reply in words, but took a step forward as an indication that he would like to enter the state-room, whereupon she opened the door for him to enter.

The old gentleman received him with a benignant smile when he went in, which was quite a contrast with the way in which he had met the young man on the occasion of his previous visit.

After inviting him to take a seat and the girl had seated herself upon the edge of one of the lower bunks, the old man commenced:

"My name is Casper Desban, and my home is in Memphis. I am pretty well to do, we have a beautiful home in the suburbs of the city, and Florence here is my only child. I have a sister residing in Oakland, California, and my daughter has been out there going to school.

"A month ago I went out to visit my daughter, and to bring her home at the expiration of her school-term, which was to be in a couple of weeks.

"I stopped part of the time at the Palace Hotel, San Francisco, and while there had the misfortune to be robbed of all the money I had with me. Of course it was only a question of a few days at most when I could have had money sent me from home, but in the mean time I had been unfortunate enough to make the acquaintance of this man Foxen, whom I mistook for a gentleman, and casually mentioned the fact of my loss to him. He at once not only offered to let me have whatever money I required, but actually forced it upon me.

"I was naturally overwhelmed with his kindness, and was foolish enough to introduce him to my daughter.

"He at once began to show her marked respect, and, whether the child really thought anything of him or not—"

"Papa, I did not," interrupted the girl at this point. "I showed him all the respect I could because he had been kind to you."

"Yes, I believe that is true," pursued the old gentleman. "And I am glad to know that Florence was not as weak as many girls of her age are. At all events, whether she merely respected or had a deeper regard for him makes no difference now. She did one very foolish thing and that was to accept a present from him—a present that could only be expected to pass between the very warmest friends or a betrothed couple. It was, in short, a case of jewels worth at least ten thousand dollars. I did not know of the affair for several days afterward; but as soon as my daughter showed them to me, I insisted upon her returning them to him at once. She did attempt to do so, but he flatly refused to accept them from her. I then took the matter in my own hands, and started in search of him with the jewel-case. But when I came to inquire I learned that he had left the hotel, but where he had gone I was unable to discover. However, I left the case of jewels, together with the amount of money which he had lent me, in charge of the landlord

for him. But what was my surprise, a few days subsequently, to receive the whole package again by messenger and the messenger could give no account of where he had got it.

"I again took the package to the landlord, explained what it contained and whom it was intended for. The landlord, upon hearing the name of the man who had owned the jewels, refused to have anything to do with them, saying that the chances were that they had been stolen. I was now in a worse predicament than ever; but as I was compelled to leave San Francisco in a great hurry, having prolonged my visit already too long, I could do nothing but take the jewels with me, hoping, however, that I should soon hear of Foxen, when I determined to return them to him.

"We were compelled to stop over in St. Louis, as I had some business to transact there, and when he had been stopping at the Planters' for about a week, who should appear but this man.

"The moment we met, and before I had time to offer to return his jewels and money, he said: 'Well, sir, that was a pretty trick you played upon me in San Francisco—that is, you and your daughter together. I could hardly have credited you with such a thing.' Thinking that he referred to my leaving the jewels for him, I said, laughingly: 'As you were no longer there, what else could I do?' To my surprise, he turned upon me with a black scowl and said: 'At least, sir, I had no idea you would abuse my friendship to the extent of robbing me!'

"I was thunder-struck. I could not make out his meaning. I still thought he must be jesting. 'What do you mean?' I demanded, half sternly. 'Come, now,' said he, 'do not attempt to play the innocent with me, old gentleman. I have seen too much of the world.'

"But as he could not fail to see the genuineness of my distress, he added, after a pause: 'Well, perhaps—possibly you are innocent. Tell me, have you seen your daughter in possession of a case of jewels?' He here went on to describe them. 'Why yes,' I said, my heart in my throat, for the affair grew more and more mysterious and horrible every instant. 'You gave them to her, of course? I did not want her to keep them, coming from a stranger, and that is why she offered to return them to you when you refused to take them back.' He eyed me sharply for a minute or two with the air of one who is debating in his mind whether he shall openly denounce you as a liar, or dispute your statement in a milder way, and finally said: 'Is this her story, old gentleman, or yours?'

"At this I lost my temper. 'What do you dare to insinuate, sir?' I demanded. 'It is not the story of either of us. It is the plain truth as told by my daughter to me!'

"The fellow laughed sarcastically. 'This is a very pretty story, indeed!' he sneered. 'Now, old gentleman, let me tell you the straight of it. Your daughter stole those diamonds!'

"'It is a lie!' I told him. 'A wicked, malicious lie! And if I possessed the manhood that I once had, you should pay dearly for this cowardly insult to my innocent child!'

"The fellow only laughed at my anger. 'You may as well hold your temper, old gentleman,' said he.

"'Never!' I cried, 'until I have been avenged for that insult! For you may know my Southern blood was up.'

"'You would do better to listen to reason,' he observed, as coolly as you please. 'Come in here till I tell you how it is.' And he pushed open the door of his room, which we happened to be near. I went in, hardly knowing what I was doing, when he resumed: 'What I tell you, old gentleman, is perfectly true. You may believe it or not.'

I cannot blame you for rejecting it. I should do the same were she my daughter. But, as I say, it is true, and the court will believe my story whether you do or not, for the reason, if for no other, that the jewels are in her possession."

"But they shall not remain in her possession!" I cried, starting for the door. "I will dash them at your dastardly feet!"

"Stop!" he said, quietly. "Do not make a fool of yourself. Look there!" and he pointed toward my own room-door, which was opposite, and to my horror, I beheld an officer standing there. "That man will enter the room at a word from me and make a search, when, of course, the jewels will be found."

"Coward! Scoundrel!" I cried in the bitterness of my despair. "What have I ever done to you that you should thus ruin my only child?"

"Be calm," he said, in the same dispassionate voice. "I have no thought of ruining your daughter, old gentleman, or you either, and that is the reason I came to talk the matter over, instead of having her arrested as I might have done. Now, I make you this proposition: Return me the jewels and pay me over one hundred thousand dollars, and the world shall never know anything about the affair."

"Glad to get out of the scrape in any way, and half believing in my daughter's guilt, I agreed to the proposition, although I knew that it would ruin me—make a beggar of me. 'But,' I told him, 'you will be compelled to rely upon my honor till I reach home, as I have not the money with me.' He reflected a few moments, and then replied: 'I will go with you. If anything should happen on the way, you can exonerate your daughter by taking the odium of the crime upon yourself. But mind,' he added with sudden energy, 'if you attempt to betray me, I will expose your daughter by having her arrested!' This is why I confessed to the guilt. Up to late yesterday afternoon he had compelled Florence to keep the jewels so that he could have something tangible in case he wanted to have her arrested. But when he got hard-pressed in his game with your friend, he was compelled to put it up, hoping, of course, to save it, and with it the money he had lost. But now that it is no longer in her possession, I feel free to speak."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CONFLAGRATION AT NIGHT.

As soon as the old man had finished his story, without a word the young man arose and left the state-room. A few moments after he returned and laid the jewel-case down upon the little table in front of the old man, with the remark:

"There, sir, is the case of jewels. They are mine now, but I have no use for them. I give them to you for your daughter."

If the young man had stuck a knife into him it could not have caused him to start more convulsively and blanch more deathly. Pushing the case away from him with a shudder, the old gentleman cried in a horrified tone:

"No, no, no, take the detestable thing away! The very sight of it makes my flesh creep! It has caused me and mine all the trouble we ever had, and I would not have it nor allow my daughter to have it!"

"But, my dear sir," protested Dan, "there can be no harm in taking them now, as Foxen has gone."

"Gone?" groaned Mr. Desban. "Yes, gone. But how long will he remain away?"

"He will not dare to return while I am here, and I shall accompany you to the end of your journey, if you will allow me."

"It is very kind of you, sir, and we shall appreciate it if you will accompany us to our home in Memphis. But the jewels we cannot accept. I should always live in mortal

dread as long as they were in our possession. I should always be expecting that he would return, and, finding this tell-tale case of jewels in our possession, no telling what he would do."

"My dear sir, if he should return and claim the jewels—which is not at all likely—you would only need to inform him that they originally belonged to me, and though, although he did win them from me at a game of cards, my friend won them back and gave them to you."

"That is all very well, my young friend," interposed the old man, dolefully, "but what proof could I have?"

"Proof? Look!" And Dan threw up the lid of the case, embossed on the inside of which was the legend in gold letters:

"PRESENTED TO

DEAD-SHOT DAN,

(Daniel Louis.)

In acknowledgment of his genius, as the Best Shot on the Pacific Coast,

BY ADMIRING FRIENDS."

The old gentleman stared at him in blank amazement.

"You don't mean to tell me that you are the famous Dead-Shot Dan, do you?" he finally asked.

"That is what some people have been foolish enough to call me," replied the young man modestly.

"It is no matter of surprise, then, my dear," said the old gentleman, turning to his daughter, "that he performed what we considered a miraculous feat the other day. I am proud to know you, sir," he added, turning to Dan again and extending his hand.

"Proud enough to accept the jewels?" inquired the other, grasping the proffered hand.

Mr. Desban was silent for some moments.

"I will make you this proposition, Mr. Louis," he finally said. "Come home with me, and if we all arrive in safety and are in the same frame of mind then as now, I will allow my daughter to accept the present."

"Very well. I accept the proposition," rejoined the young man, rising to go.

Just then the breakfast-bell rung and they all went into the cabin together.

"Seems ter me es though yer was a-making purty good headway with the gal," observed the old major, with a mischievous twinkle in his eye when Dan returned to his own state-room late in the afternoon.

"What makes you think so?" demanded the young man, sharply, coloring violently.

"Why, ye've spent the better part of the day with her, an' it w'd be cur'us if yer didn't purty nigh understand one another afore this time."

"You were never more mistaken in your life, major. As a matter of fact, I haven't addressed half a dozen words to the young lady."

"Huh," grunted old Rusty. "Then ye're not half the shot with yer tongue thet ye air with the derringer."

"The fact is, gentlemen," interposed Dan, impatiently, "I had no thought of the girl. I have been talking to her father all the time, or rather he has been talking to me. He has been telling me how he came to get into this man Foxen's power."

Dan then went on to relate the story which the old gentleman had told him; at the conclusion of which he said:

"And I propose to see them through, if it cost me my life, for I have taken an interest in these people such as I never took in anybody before."

"Don't blame yer a bit," responded the major. "They're nice folks—specially the gal, an' we'll go 'long with ye, if yer want us, ch, Rusty?"

"Bet yer life," rejoined the gentleman addressed.

"Thank you, my friends. I appreciate your kindness. But if you don't mind, I'm going to lie down and have a few winks of sleep, as I didn't close an eye last night, you remember."

Anybody who has been on a Mississippi steamer on a warm summer day knows how awfully drowsy it is, and Dan was soon asleep, from which his friends did not wake him even for supper, and he slept far into the night.

When he finally did awake, it was at the sound of hurrying to and fro on deck, accompanied by shrieks and cries of alarm from the passengers, mingled with the dread cry of fire!

Dan dressed himself hurriedly and rushed out upon the guards, when a sight met him that caused his heart to stand still.

The boat had reached that portion of the river, just below Cairo, where the confluence of the Ohio causes the Mississippi to widen out into miles of watery waste, and here, where the shores are almost out of sight, the great steamer had suddenly and mysteriously caught on fire, and was already a vast sheet of flame.

The young man's first thought was of his new friends, the old man and his pretty daughter.

He therefore lost no time in dashing along through the already thickening smoke, mingled with an occasional tongue of flame, to their state-room.

He did not wait to knock, but wrenched the door open at once, when a volume of of dense black smoke burst upon him, driving him back.

A terrible suspicion seized him.

The old gentleman and his daughter had doubtless been suffocated in the smoke!

Recovering himself, therefore, he dashed into the room, in spite of the stifling smudge, and proceeded to search for his friends.

But he could find nothing of them, and finally came to the conclusion that his friends had made their escape before the smoke had become so dense.

When he reached the deck once more, he saw that all the boats available had already been manned, and were making their way, laden with passengers, for the distant shores, while a hundred or so frantic men and women were left to save themselves or perish.

These were all collected on one side of the boat—the only side where any living being could exist for an instant, as the rest of the craft was already enveloped in flame, and to this part Dan made his way at once to look for his friends. But his search was in vain. They were nowhere to be seen.

Hoping that they had succeeded in getting into one of the small boats, he looked about for some means of saving himself. He had taken the precaution to put the jewel-case into his pocket, and having no other baggage aboard, he had nothing to do but look out for himself.

Noticing a rope attached to a spar, he first made one end of the rope fast to the guards and then threw the spar overboard. Then strapping his pistol around his head to keep it above water, he grasped the rope and slid down to the water.

Once mounted astride the spar, it was but the work of an instant to sever the rope with his knife, and a few seconds later he floated clear of the rapidly-perishing steamer.

But no sooner was he out of danger himself, than he thought of the selfishness of his conduct in saving himself and leaving others to perish, and this caused him to glance back at the burning steamer, with the idea of returning to it in case there appeared to be any hope of rescuing any one.

The night was very dark, the sky being overcast with clouds which the dense volume

of black smoke rendered all the darker, and the glare of the burning steamer illumined the dark waters for a long distance.

For a few seconds the young man sat astride the spar earnestly scanning the flaming vessel, when all of a sudden he was surprised and relieved to see a number of small boats approach from somewhere in the dark, and before he had recovered from his surprise the remaining passengers had been lowered into them and the boats again paddled away into the darkness.

They had hardly disappeared, and Dan was just thinking about resuming his slow and painful task of paddling ashore with a piece of board, when something occurred which made him pause.

The deck of the steamer fell in with a crash, sending a shower of sparks on high and illuminating the heavens for an instant, as well as lighting up the water in the immediate vicinity of the vessel, and he saw, on the only portion of the boat not yet swathed in flame, the fore-castle, two figures, while in the water beneath was a small boat containing a single figure, who was standing erect and appeared to be resisting the efforts of the two persons on the fore-castle from entering the small boat.

What it meant or who the parties were Dan had not the least idea, but he made up his mind without delay that there was some villainy going on, and he determined to interfere if possible.

He therefore set to paddling with all the energy he possessed toward the burning vessel.

When he got a little nearer, he observed that what he had suspected was an actual fact, the person in the boat was keeping the others from entering.

He also saw that in a few seconds at most the fire would have eaten its way to where the two figures stood, and licked them up in its fury.

He was satisfied now that the person was a would-be murderer, and that his destruction was the only means of saving the others; so without waiting to consider the matter any further, Dan snatched his pistol from the back of his head where it hung, and fired. The next instant the figure pitched forward into the water, and the two persons sprung into the small boat just as the fore-castle followed the rest of the vessel into the waves.

CHAPTER IX.

A STRUGGLE FOR LIFE.

DAN pulled away now with all the strength he possessed to reach the small boat.

He was anxious to see who the persons were whom he had saved, and also desired to ascertain how badly he had hurt the man whom he had shot.

But before he had covered half the distance, he was horrified to see, all of a sudden, the boat capsize and the two persons plunge into the water.

And what rendered matters still worse, the fire of the burning vessel had so far subsided, or its glare screened by intervening timbers, that all was total darkness in the vicinity of the boat.

He pulled more manfully than ever now, and was soon near enough to discern an outline of the people struggling in the water.

As he approached a little nearer he was surprised to see that there were three of them.

One had partially climbed upon the capsize boat, and the other two were clinging to the gunwales on either side.

A few more strokes now brought him upon the scene, and he grasped the first one he came to, which he was surprised to find was a woman, and raised her upon the spar.

This was ticklish business, as the least thing was calculated to cause the spar to roll and thus plunge its passengers into the water. But Dan was very calm, and to his great advantage the unknown woman was al-

so. As soon as he felt himself safely seated with the woman in front of him, Dan said:

"Clear the boat, gentlemen, and we can soon right her."

To his unutterable surprise, the man who had crawled upon the boat sprung into the water at his very side, and cried in a husky voice:

"I'll clear you, curse you, Dan Louis!" and struck at the young man's leg.

Dan recognized the voice at once as that of Foxen, and a sharp pang told him that the fellow had struck him with a knife.

And what was worse the blow, together with the excitement in finding who his assailant was, served to unseat Dan and he rolled into the water with his charge.

He did not lose his presence of mind, however, and grasping the woman, he raised her up and whispered to her to take a firm hold upon the spar. To his satisfaction, she did as she was told, and the young man turned his attention to his assailant, who had come at him at this moment with the evident intention of administering another blow with the knife.

But Dave was too quick for him, and grasped his wrist in the nick of time to prevent the fellow from plunging the knife into his back.

The men were pretty equally matched, and for a time Foxen gave Dan all he wanted to do; but ere long he noticed that the gambler was losing his strength.

And then, as a sudden flash of light from a falling timber lighted up the scene, Dan saw that his antagonist was badly wounded and that his face was covered with blood, showing that Dan must have wounded him in the head when he fired.

Still, the fellow struggled on manfully, and Dan, seeing that unless matters were brought to a climax very soon, he should be exhausted, became desperate, and, nerving himself to the utmost, succeeded in grasping Foxen by the throat.

His grip was something prodigious ordinarily, and now that it was strengthened by desperation, it was not long before the gambler began to gasp and grow perceptibly weaker, and ere long to relax his own grasp on the young man, so that the latter had no trouble in throwing him away from him.

As soon as he got rid of his antagonist, Dan grasped the man who still clung to the gunwale of the boat, and bearing him in his arms to the spar, bade him take hold of it, which he did, and then the young man tried to right the capsized boat. But after several futile efforts, he abandoned the task and returned to the spar.

"Now, good folks," he said, "if you think you can endure the hardship of the water for a few hours, I will lash you to the spar with this rope and do what I can to paddle it ashore. We can at least keep our heads above water till daylight, when I have no doubt some boat will pick us up."

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Louis," was the lady's response, and he recognized her voice at once as that of Florence Desban. "Again you have saved us from that heartless man. How shall we ever repay you?"

"Let us think about getting out of this first, and we can talk about thanks and such things afterward, if we see fit. But you appear to be chilled, Miss Desban. Let me put my coat about you."

He had noticed that her voice trembled and her teeth chattered as with cold, when she spoke. But she persistently refused to allow him to remove his coat, which when he attempted, he found an utter impossibility, anyway.

The old gentleman was too much chilled or too weak to talk, for he allowed himself to be lashed to the spar in silence.

When this task was completed Dan again mounted the spar and, as he had no board now, proceeded to paddle away as well as he could with his hands.

The swift current of the river bore them down rapidly, and Dan's only hope was to veer his spar as far as possible toward the left or Tennessee bank, so that as soon as they reached a bend which he knew to be only a short distance below, he could run it upon the bar.

Very few words passed between Dan and the girl, and as for her father, he never once opened his mouth. Only once did the girl speak at any length, and that was to ask Dan if he knew what had become of his two friends, the major and old Rusty.

A pang of remorse stung the young man. In his excitement and anxiety about Florence and her father, he had entirely forgotten the two kind-hearted but simple old chaps.

It would not do to tell her this, however, so he said, after some hesitation:

"The fact is, Miss Desban, that I was asleep when the fire broke out, and I trust that my old friends got off in one of the boats."

"I do hope so," she said. "But if they didn't?"

Dan could think of no fitting reply, so he remained silent, and at the same time he thanked his stars that it was too dark for her to see his face, which he felt must be scarlet with shame.

From this scarcely a dozen words were spoken, and thus the dismal night wore on, and the first gray streaks of morning were breaking over the low, dark landscape when their ears were greeted by the sound of the paddle-wheels of a steamer, and a few moments later the dark outlines of her, besprinkled here and there with lights, came swinging round the bend.

The little group had been silent for a long time, and were so benumbed with cold and weakened by long exposure that they were scarcely able to speak; but when the boat hove in view they took on new hope and even gave vent to a feeble exclamation of joy.

Dan, the only one in the party with sufficient remaining strength, hailed the steamer with all the lustiness that he could summon, and was gratified a few seconds later, to see a small boat lowered manned by two stalwart roustabouts. The boat was not long in pulling up alongside of the half-dead trio, and with the assistance of the powerful deckhands, they were lifted into the skiff.

As the rescuing craft pulled toward the steamer the three unfortunates, who had spent the night in the water, regained enough of their cheerfulness to crack a few jokes at their late misfortunes, and even give vent to an occasional peal of laughter.

"Just wait till I get you down on my plantation, my boy," observed the old gentleman merrily, "and if we don't make up for this, I'm a Dutchman. We will open the oldest wine on the place!"

At this everybody laughed, and thus they went on until the side of the steamer was reached, when a rope ladder was lowered and the little party taken on board.

The moment they stepped on deck, however, their hearts sunk, for there in all his ugliness stood Foxen, although his head was bandaged and he leaned heavily on a cane. There was a sardonic grin on his face, however, and a look of malignant triumph that made our friends a little sick at heart. Especially when they noticed who accompanied him, for, standing beside him was a United States marshal, who, as soon as Dan stepped forward, also advanced and said:

"Is your name Daniel Louis, sir?"

"That is my name," replied Dan, calmly.

"Well, sir, I have a warrant for your arrest."

"Upon what charge?" demanded Dan.

"Attempted murder and conspiring with two other parties to rob a certain person of a case of valuable diamonds."

Dan was thunderstruck, but before he had time to reply the marshal's two assistants stepped forward and placed the irons on him, and in the mean time, the marshal approached Mr. Desban and demanded his name.

"Casper Desban," was the reply.

"Then I arrest you as principal in the robbery of Donald Foxen of a case of diamonds valued at ten thousand dollars."

The handcuffs were placed upon the old gentleman, and the marshal then turned to Florence and went through the same formula with her, but omitted the handcuffs.

The marshal then proceeded to search Dan and soon brought out the case of diamonds. Holding them up before Foxen he asked:

"Is this the case, sir?"

"It is," replied Foxen.

"Is there any mark about the case by which you can identify it?" asked the marshal.

This was a little unexpected, and the gambler turned a little pale, and before he had time to recover his accustomed composure the marshal had opened the case, and seeing the inscription on the inside of the lid, asked:

"How does it come, sir, that Daniel Louis's name is in here?"

"Oh, I suppose he had it put in after he stole it," faltered the gambler.

"That hardly looks reasonable, when you say that the case was stolen from you the day before yesterday in St. Louis, and these people have been aboard of the boat ever since. Where did you get this case sir?" he went on, addressing Dan.

"The inscription tells you, sir."

"How came it in Mr. Foxen's possession?"

"He won it from me at a game of cards in San Francisco."

"And how did you get it back?"

"I win it from him in a little game, that's how!" came a hoarse, familiar voice, and the major stepped from the crowd of passengers who had gathered on the deck. "Them's the facts, sir, an' thet durned coyote daren't dispute it!"

CHAPTER X.

DOSSED WITH HIS OWN MEDICINE.

THE major's sudden appearance was so unexpected to the gambler that he was unable to reply, and before he had time to recover from his shock old Rusty stepped to the front.

"Them's facts, Mr. Marshal," he drawled. "I see the major do it myself, an' so did Cap'n Dudley o' the Gray Eagle."

"That is true," said the captain, who stepped forward at that moment. "I witnessed the game in which the case of jewels was won from this man, whom I happen to know as a skin gambler, as we call them along the river. I also know that he was engaged in some sort of a black-mailing scheme against this old gentleman and his daughter, when this young man discovered it and frustrated his scheme. More than that, I have pretty good evidence that it was he that set fire to my boat last night."

"It's a lie!" roared the gambler, who had just succeeded in regaining his voice.

"Whether this is true or not," broke in Dan, "This much I do know. That when this old gentleman and his daughter were trying to escape from the burning vessel I discovered this man holding them back, and only for the fact that I fired at him and the ball of my pistol stunned him so that he fell into the water, he would have compelled them to remain on the burning vessel until they perished."

"That is perfectly true," corroborated the old gentleman. "My daughter and I had failed to get into the first boats—those of the vessel—but were about to enter one of the second lot—those sent to us from the shore, when this man suddenly appeared with a boat and told the crews of the other boats that he would take care of us. As they

were already crowded, the crews rowed away without us before we had time to protest, and then when they were gone, he laughed at us and refused to let us enter his own boat, telling us that as he had failed in his former design, he would now have the pleasure of seeing us perish in the flames!"

An audible shudder went through the crowd of bystanders.

Even the marshal turned a little pale at such heartlessness.

He turned upon the miserable gambler, who was fast losing his self-composure, and, after eying him keenly for a full minute, said, in a low, calm voice:

"What have you to say to these charges, sir?"

"They are all lies! Infamous, wicked lies!" he cried, with a desperate attempt at coolness.

Again the marshal looked him over, and finally said:

"I wish for your sake, sir, that I could believe they were. Unfortunately, however, the evidence of these people, some of whom I know to bear irreproachable reputations, no less than your own self-accusing face, tells me that you are guilty of all they have charged you with, and that the charge of attempted murder against this young man as well as your charge against this old gentleman and his daughter of robbery, is groundless. However, if you demand it, I shall have to take them before some tribunal. But under the circumstances I should advise you not to press the charge, as it will only make your own case go worse with you."

"Let them go," muttered the gambler doggedly. "Anybody can see it is a conspiracy to ruin me."

In the mean time the marshal's assistant, at the latter's order, had removed the handcuffs from Dan and the old gentleman.

As soon as the gambler had finished speaking he turned to go.

"Hold on!" cried Captain Dudley, grasping him by the arm. "Marshal, be good enough to take this man in charge till we get ashore, when I shall procure a warrant for his arrest on the charge of incendiarism, attempted blackmail and attempted murder."

"Very well, captain," said the marshal. "As I know you to be a responsible man, I shall do as you request. Detain that man!" he went on addressing his assistant. "Put him in irons and take him to my state-room till we land at Memphis."

The deputy did as ordered, and the gambler submitted without protest, and was taken away.

Dan and his two friends were then given state-rooms and some of the passengers gave them a change of clothing and, after a good breakfast, they returned to their wonted cheerfulness.

"I should like to know," observed Dan, when the three friends were seated in the cabin together after breakfast, "what caused that fellow to persecute you with such persistence?"

"He was bent upon carrying out his scheme of blackmail, I presume," rejoined the old gentleman.

"Ah, sir, I believe there was something more than that," insisted Dan. "If that had been his only motive, it is hardly likely that he would have followed you any longer than he found his scheme frustrated. And the fact that he tried to prevent you and Miss Florence from escaping from the burning steamer would indicate that he had a terrible grudge against you."

"It may be so, and yet I cannot imagine what it is for. So far as I know, I never had but one enemy in my life, and that was when I was a young man, and he, poor wretch, ended his own miserable life, after causing all the trouble he could to others."

"How was it, sir?" asked the young man, with an eager countenance.

"Yes, tell us, papa," chimed in Florence. "I have heard the story often, but it is always new to me—always interesting."

"It was when I was courting your mother, my child," began the old man, stroking the girl's hair affectionately. "Like most young men who court a woman worth having, I had a rival. His name was Edward Thorne, somewhat younger than myself and, I must acknowledge, considerably better looking. However, for some reason or other, your mother accepted me and rejected him. Instead of accepting his fate like a man, and seeking happiness in another direction, he attempted to avenge his imaginary wrongs in various ways, and made us no end of trouble. And I shall always believe that he knew more than he cared to tell about the abduction of our first-born, a little son only three years old. I used every means in my power to recover the child and spent two or three fortunes, but to no avail, and finally had to resign ourselves to our fate. Heaven was kind enough to us, however, to give us this sweet daughter as a compensation; but I cannot help but think what a staff my son would have been in my old age."

"And Thorne?" interposed the young man, as Mr. Desban paused, and did not appear inclined to proceed.

"Oh, yes," resumed the old gentleman. "He went West somewhere, and we heard afterward that he ended his own life, after losing heavily at cards—he was an inveterate gambler. Let me see," pursued the old man reflectively. "My boy would have been about twenty-two now."

"Just my age," observed Dan.

"Indeed?" cried the old man enthusiastically, as though there was anything remarkable about two young men being the same age. "By the way, my young friend, you have no home, why not come and be my son? I have plenty, and you will be better off than rambling about the world with no settled purpose."

"I thank you for your kind offer, sir," responded Dan. "But I could not think of accepting it for two reasons. In the first place, I could not think of accepting bounty that I had not earned, and in the second place, I could never be contented to settle down in one spot for any length of time, and—what's that?"

As he spoke two or three sharp reports of fire-arms in quick succession rung out at the opposite end of the cabin from where they sat.

Dan sprung to his feet and started to rush toward the scene, but felt himself detained by some one clinging to his sleeve.

On looking round he saw that it was Florence, and her great beautiful eyes were gazing appealingly into his.

"Don't go!" she pleaded in a gentle voice.

"I must go!" he urged impatiently, struggling to free himself from her grasp. "Some one may be in danger."

"For my sake!" she implored.

To a more susceptible and less practical young man this would have been sufficient to restrain him. But Dan possessed too much of the spirit of the hero to be staid by anything when he thought anybody was in need of assistance.

Without another word, therefore, and not daring to encounter those wonderful eyes, he gently tore himself away, and dashed off toward the other end of the cabin.

There he soon saw what the trouble was.

The boat had landed at a wooding-place a few minutes before, and a gang of roughs, friends of Foxen, had come aboard, and, overpowering the marshal and his two deputies, had rescued the prisoner!

When Dan arrived upon the scene he found the marshal, who had been badly wounded, bound hand and foot, as also were his deputies; and, revolver in hand, the gambler was

compelling the captain of the boat to head her for the shore.

As soon as he understood the situation, Dan took a bead on the gambler before the latter had time to see him. The next instant Foxen threw up his hands and reeled to the deck.

A second and third shot brought down two of his gang, and the rest began to waver.

One of them, however, still held out, and, turning upon Dave, fired two shots at him in quick succession.

The young man felt a keen twinge of pain, which only nerved him for another shot, which he delivered to such good purpose that the ruffian sunk to the deck, and then Dan felt a dizziness coming over him that he could not resist. Everything swam before him, and his strength oozed away. Then the world grew dark, and all was over for a moment; but only for a moment. The next instant he was upon his feet again, ready for the fray.

When they had seen him fall, the panic-stricken ruffians regained courage and rallied, and by the time Dan was on his feet three of them made for him.

They had already seen enough of his marksmanship to convince them that they had no chance as long as they were at a distance—that their only salvation was to get him at close quarters.

Therefore they rushed upon him before he had time to deliver more than one shot, which brought one of their number to the deck, and the other two grappled with him.

Seeing the disadvantage he would be at with two of them, he strove manfully to use his pistol, but to no purpose. One of the ruffians clutched the wrist of the hand in which he held his revolver, and the other had him by the throat, and the three went to the deck.

Even then they could not overpower him, and he saw one of them draw a knife. Quicker than lightning Dan clutched the hand with the grip of desperation and succeeded in wrenching the knife away, and before the fellow had time to regain it, Dan had buried the blade in the ruffian's side. The latter at once released his hold and rolled over on the deck, while the other fought more desperately than ever.

Dan had him by the throat and it appeared as though the battle was his.

But just at that moment a most unexpected thing occurred. The man whom he had stabbed recovered from his faint and, clutching the knife again, plunged it into the young man's side. This was so sudden and unexpected that it took the sport completely off his guard.

The pain was so intense from the new wound that, with the loss of blood he had already sustained, Dan felt his strength giving way, and soon became unconscious.

CHAPTER XI.

A THRILLING ADVENTURE.

DAN'S return to consciousness was with the sensation of being in the cold water.

At first he could not realize his situation.

He imagined this to be a part of his experience after the burning of the steamer.

Opening his eyes and looking about, however, he saw that it was still dark and that he was alone and in the water, but no burning boat was in sight.

Instinct had caused him to struggle to keep his head above the water the moment he felt its chilly waves overwhelming him.

As soon as he realized his situation, he struck out to swim, without any definite idea which way he was going.

As his eyes became accustomed to the darkness, he saw that the shore was not far distant and that he was fortunately making in that direction.

He had not gone far when he encountered

a floating pine log, and getting upon this, he had little trouble in paddling to the shore.

When he had reached the shore, Dan stopped and listened.

He knew that he could not have got into the water without some one putting him there, and he began to wonder who it could have been.

As he listened, the muffled sound of oars broke upon him, and it was evident that the oarsmen were receding.

These, then, must be his would-be slayers.

They had evidently taken him from the steamer after he became unconscious, put him into the skiff and brought him to this lonely spot for the express purpose of drowning him.

What puzzled him most was to know who his persecutor was.

It could not be Foxen, he thought, for he was satisfied that the gambler was dead after the last shot he had received from Dan's pistol.

But Dan's greatest anxiety was to know what to do and where to go.

He had not the slightest conception of where he was, and his wet clothing clinging about him drove a chill to his heart.

He was moreover very weak from loss of blood and the pain caused from his late wounds. And besides, he was extremely hungry and faint.

However, it would do no good to stand there pondering over his situation, so he struck out from the river-bank, where, he knew not nor did he care a great deal.

On, on he pushed, over fields, through swamps and around bayous and over muddy ditches.

Hour after hour went by and still no sign of human being or human habitation.

Finally, however, his eyes were gladdened at the sight of a light a long way off.

The sight buoyed up his waning strength, and he pushed on with all the energy he could muster.

At length, after another half hour's walk, he came upon a small hut in the edge of the wood, which he supposed was a negro shanty.

There was but one window, and from this the light he had sighted from a distance was streaming.

Dan was about to knock at the door, but the sound of voices inside caused him to hesitate.

They were not the voices of negroes, and his curiosity was aroused to know who it could be that was still awake at this late hour.

He soon discovered from the angry tone of the voices that there were several men, and that they were wrangling over something.

Passing round to the darker side of the hut (the light from the window illuminated the side on which he then was somewhat), Dan looked for an opening through which he could inspect the interior of the hut.

He was not long in finding a crevice between the rough logs through which the light was coming, and, putting his eye to the hole, was astounded at what he saw.

About a dozen hard-faced men were collected about a blazing fire in an old-fashioned fireplace, and in their center was a box from which one of the number, who appeared to be the leader, was slowly taking roll after roll of bank-notes, together with gold and silver coin!

A horrible suspicion came upon Dan at once.

These were evidently river pirates, who had committed a robbery somewhere, possibly the boat on which Dan and his friends had been when the fight occurred.

This led to another horrible apprehension. Perhaps they had murdered his friends.

While these reflections were passing through his mind, the men inside completed their work of taking the money from the

box and made what appeared to be a satisfactory division of the spoils.

They then brought out a large black bottle and passed it about and every one took a long pull at it.

After this one of them got up and going into a corner, brought out a bag of provisions and spread the contents out on a rude table which he dragged from somewhere in the darkness.

The men all seated themselves about the table on boxes and kegs, and fell to, ravenously.

This whetted Dan's already eager appetite tenfold, and he became so hungry that he could hardly restrain himself from risking his life by going inside and asking for something to eat.

He probably would have done so had he not been arrested at that moment by what he heard.

"Thet was a purty good haul," said the leader, a black-bearded, villainous-looking rascal. "Another sich pull as thet, an' yourn truly'll retire from the business, settle down and become an honest man."

At the mention of his becoming an honest man, they all roared with laughter.

"Yes, cap'n, thet was a right smart haul," chimed in a square-jawed man, whom the others called "Pink," probably from the fact that he had one of the reddest heads of hair Dan had ever seen. "I sh'u'dn't wonder if I w'u'd retire on my laurels, too, if we c'u'd make another sich haul."

"I don't wanten run across no sich a fighter as thet young chap they called Dead-Shot Dan ag'in, though," continued the captain.

"He *was* a good one," remarked one of gang.

"Good one?" ejaculated the leader. "He was simply scissors. By the Eternal! I believe he could shoot the eye outen a needle and not half try!"

"I ruther reckon he won't do no more shootin' though," laughed Pink.

"Well, hardly," returned the leader.

"If he does," put in another, "he'll do it with wet powder."

"Don't be too sure of that," chimed in one who had been silent up to that moment.

"Whut d'ye mean?" demanded the leader.

"I mean that he's a capital swimmer as well as shot. I've seen him swim out in California."

"Huh!" grunted the leader. "Wal, I guess he won't swim much in the condition he was in when we doused him."

"I sh'u'd say not," responded Pink, with an angry scowl at the man who had dared to say a word for the young man whom they all seemed glad was gone.

Dan's champion subsided into silence, but it was evident that he had rendered himself exceedingly unpopular by his action.

Dan wondered who he could be.

He did not appear to be of the same guild as the others.

His language and appearance all showed him to be refined and well-bred, whereas the others were evidently of the lowest possible cast of humanity.

Who could he be?

But before the River Sport had time to reflect any further on the subject he was surprised to see the man who had taken up for him get up and leave the room.

In a few moments Dan heard him coming around the side of the hut.

Dan was undecided what to do.

He could, if he desired, keep himself concealed from the fellow, but was it better policy to do this than to make himself known and run the risk of being turned over to the fellow's pals? For after all, he had no assurance that the man, simply because he had said that Dan could swim as well as shoot, was not an enemy as well as the rest.

But if his purpose had been to hide, he had deferred it too long, for the next in-

tant the fellow stood before him, as he leaned, half-fainting against the cabin for support.

The fellow came up very close and peered through the darkness to scan him, as it was so dark that he could only see the outlines of the young man, and finally said:

"Is this you, Dan?"

The latter was too much surprised to speak for a moment, and the other went on:

"Come, you must stay here. They will find you before long and then it will be all day with you. Come with me."

With that he started off directly away from the hut, and Dan mechanically followed him.

The man went on for some time without apparently giving a thought to Dan, but after a while he turned, and, seeing that Dan was staggering from actual weakness, the fellow stopped, took the young man by the arm and assisted him along.

Not long after this Dan felt that they were entering some kind of an inclosure, but what it was he could not imagine.

They walked what appeared to Dan to be a hundred yards or so, when his conductor suddenly stopped and, pushing him down upon a seat, said:

"Wait there till I make a light."

With that the fellow struck a match and applied it to a grease lamp that was suspended from the ceiling by a chain.

As soon as the light flared up Dan took a survey of his surroundings, and was surprised at what he saw.

The place he was in was a cave, rock-walled, and extended as far as he could see.

CHAPTER XII.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

ALL this time Dan was wondering who his new-found friend could be, and when the light flared up he took occasion to study his face.

To his surprise he saw a rather handsome young man about his own age, tall and well built.

When he had got through with lighting the lamp, the young man turned to Dan with a smile, and asked:

"Are you hungry, old fellow?"

"Yes," returned the young man. "Very."

"So I supposed. Just wait here a bit and I will bring you something to eat and some dry clothes."

And without another word, he dashed off on a run and was soon out of sight.

Dan was more puzzled than ever.

Where could he have seen this man? For he was sure he had seen him somewhere.

Evidently the fellow felt kindly toward him, else he would not have risked his own scalp to befriend him as he had.

But what if this was only a scheme to betray him?

He soon dismissed this thought, though, for the young man returned in a remarkably short space of time, before Dan thought he had time to reach the hut, much less return from it, loaded down with provisions, clothes and the like.

"Here you are," he said in a cheerful voice, throwing a bundle of coarse but comfortable clothing down in front of Dan. "Better put these on first thing, and that will put you in a better condition for eating your grub."

Dan wanted no further bidding, but disrobed and donned the dry clothing at once.

As soon as he was dressed, the young man produced a bottle of good spirits.

"Try that," he said, in his good-natured way. "It will drive the chills out of your bones."

Dan took the bottle and had a good pull at it.

The young man was right; it not only drove the chills away, but appeared to put new life in the young sport.

"Now I presume you can nibble at something," the stranger went on, taking out a

lot of cold meats, bread and other substantial viands, and spreading them out on a rock that seemed made purposely for a table.

"Thank you," said Dan, gratefully, and sat up to the improvised table.

When he had partially appeased his appetite, and the liquor began to have its exhilarating effect, Dan felt as though he would like to learn something of his benefactor, as well as show him that he appreciated his kindness.

"I do not know how I shall ever repay you for your kindness," he began.

"Don't mention it," said the other, lightly. "I am repaid to see that you enjoy it."

"You are very kind. But would you mind telling me how you happened to know me, and also how you knew that I was outside of the cabin?"

"Certainly not," returned the stranger, promptly. "I knew you because you saved my life at Stockton, California, about a year ago by shooting the knife out of a Greaser's hand just as he was about to plunge it into me. And I knew that you were outside of the hut because I saw you when you came up!"

"Oh, you happened to be outside, did you?"

"No, I was not outside. I was peeping out of a chink. The fact is, I was more than half-expecting you and watched for you."

This was a poser for the sport.

Why was the young man expecting him?

"You may be surprised that I should have known that you would come this way," continued the young man, "but the fact is, I saw you begin to swim before the skiff got out of sight of you. You were probably too much engrossed in saving yourself just then to notice that we were only a short distance away at the time. My companions did not notice it, as they did not look back. Then as soon as we landed, which was only a short time after we left you, I made an excuse that I wanted to stop, and allowing them to go on, I sat down on the shore and watched you as well as I could through the darkness. I could keep track of you by the sound of the splashing water as you swam. My intention was to take you in charge as soon as you came out, but my companions got suspicious that something was wrong and began to watch me," so I had to go with them."

"Did they suspect that I was safe and that you desired to assist me?"

"Oh, no; that never entered their heads. They were afraid that I would desert them and give them away for the robbery they had just committed."

"Had you no part in the robbery?"

"Oh, yes, I was one of them. But they have known for a long time that I am sick of this sort of thing and would like to get away from them, if I dared."

"Why do you not dare to leave them?"

"Because they would kill me."

"Can you not keep out of their way?"

"Oh, I suppose I could, but when there are fifty against one, it is up-hill business."

"There are two of us now, though," suggested Dan.

The young man shook his head dismally.

"Two against fifty are better than one against fifty, but it is still an unequal match."

"That depends upon who the two are. If you can procure a couple of good six-shooters, I think I am about equal to half the number at long range, anyway."

"I can easily believe that," rejoined the young man dolefully, "but you would have poor support in me."

"I guess you can render me a good deal of assistance in a pinch," laughed Dan.

"Suppose you get me the pistols and see what we can do in a fair fight."

"Oh, as to that, I brought you a pair of pistols," said the young man, producing the weapons.

Dan's eyes glistened at the sight of the revolvers, which were beauties, and all loaded ready for business.

"Why did you bring me these if you did not wish me to join issues with you?" he asked, after he had examined the weapons.

"Oh, those are for you to defend yourself with."

"You do not care to leave this gang, then?"

"I dare not, although I would like to."

"How came you to join them in the first place?"

"Romance. I was a young fellow, just out of school and full of romance, and I thought I would like to be a brigand, such as I had read about."

"And it is not what you expected it would be, eh?"

"Oh, it is romantic enough, as far as that goes, but I begin to see that I am wasting my life foolishly. I should be settled down to some business."

"Where do your folks live?"

"In Stockton, California. And I suppose you would like to know what my name is. Well, I cannot give you my real name, as we are all sworn not to divulge that to any living man. However, I am known among my mates as Crisp, and you can call me that."

"Well, Crisp," said the River Sport in a kindly voice, "I am sorry you will not allow me to help you as you have helped me."

"My dear sir," ejaculated Crisp, enthusiastically, jumping to his feet, "you have already helped me more than I can ever repay. Do not talk of repaying the little I have done."

"But are you not rather unpopular among the gang?"

"Well, I admit that I am not as popular as some. That is on account of the course I have always taken."

"What was that?"

"I have always counseled mercy when any one was taken or we were about to commit a robbery. I never liked to see blood shed except in self-defense."

"I should think it would be rather unpleasant to belong to a society where there is disagreement. You had better take my advice and leave them at once, old man. We will stick together and I am sure there will be no risk, and as for money, we can get plenty of that."

"Where?"

"Well, I have a good deal of my own, besides the old gentleman is rich, and he will never see me or a friend of mine want for anything as long as he has a cent."

"Do you mean the old gentleman that was on the boat?"

"Yes."

Crisp shook his head. This filled Dan with apprehension.

"Has anything happened to him?" asked Dan quickly.

"I do not know positively, but I am afraid so."

"Why?"

"The captain told his men not to let that old fellow off alive," replied Crisp.

"What captain?"

"Captain Foxen."

"What has he to do with this gang?"

"He is the leader of it."

"You do not mean to tell me that the man I saw in the cabin is Captain Foxen?"

"Certainly I do."

"Why, he looks nothing like Foxen, and he talks like a roustabout, the fellow inside."

Crisp laughed.

"That is nothing. He is in disguise."

"Does he have to disguise himself from his men?"

"Of course. If they knew that the gentlemanly fellow who was ordering the marshal to arrest you was the same as he that leads them they wouldn't obey one of his orders. They think that he has no soul, and it is impossible to convince these rough men

that that kind of a man could have any refinement about him."

"How did you come to know all this?"

Crisp stopped short and turned a little pale.

"I'm afraid I've already told you too much, if the gang—"

"Yas, ruther too much fer yer health, young feller!"

Both young men looked up to see who the speaker was, and were horrified to see old Pink standing there with two murderous-looking revolvers pointing at them!

CHAPTER XIII.

IN A TIGHT PLACE.

CRISP was too much panic-stricken to move, and stood like a statue, staring at the new-comer as though he had been some monstrosity.

But it was quite different with Dan; he did not lose his presence of mind, in the least.

He knew it would not do to make any move while Pink had the drop on him, so he bided his time and watched his opportunity.

It soon came. The old fellow could not stand there long without saying something; neither could he keep his eyes on both men at once very well, especially while he was talking.

Taking his eyes off Dan and fixing them on Crisp, he began:

"Yas, yer talkin' altogether too much fer a young feller, and talkin' 'bout things that yer hadn't orter. I'll jest hev ter tell the cap'n, and—"

He paused, for something rather astonishing had happened.

First one and then the other of his pistols had flown out of his hands as though they had suddenly taken wings!

He could not understand the meaning of it.

Neither could Crisp, at the moment, although he had heard two pistol-shots in rapid succession.

Dan was the only one who really understood the mystery, for he it was fired the unerring shots that had done the work.

Pink understood more about it the next instant when he saw Dan's two pistols poked into his face, and the cool voice of that young man commanded him to hold up his hands.

The old pirate was dumfounded and began to tremble violently as he was about to raise his hands, but at that moment something occurred to change the order of things.

Just as the old man was about to raise his trembling hands above his head, and Dan had his eyes fixed on him, there came a stentorian voice that every one recognized.

"Put down them hands, coward! Are you going to be done fer by a couple o' boys?"

And when Dan and the other two looked up they beheld the black-bearded leader of the gang, whom Dan now knew to be none other than Donald Foxen!

He stood there as he finished speaking, glaring at the three men, with a couple of pistols leveled at Dan.

"Lower them guns!" roared Foxen. "Lower 'em, I say, or I'll fire, curse ye!"

Scarcely were the words out of his mouth when, instead of lowering his pistols, Dan blazed away, and made the best shot of his life.

Firing with both pistols at once, he carried away, at one shot, both the weapons of the astounded Foxen!

That individual was too badly frightened to stop to see what had caused the remarkable coincidence, and was about to take to his heels, when a demoniac yell behind him warned him that his whole gang was at hand.

This nerved the naturally cowardly ruffian, and he stood his ground.

For in the first place, he felt a certain security as long as they were at his back, and in the second place, he knew that if he showed the white feather before these men, his leadership was at an end.

Under this pressure the captain soon regained his courage and commanded his men to charge upon the band, as he imagined it to be, intrenched in the cave, and take them dead or alive.

The men wanted no further order.

Without stopping to consider the possible consequences, they dashed on, in spite of the fact that Dan brought two of their number to the ground before they had taken half a dozen steps in advance.

This only infuriated them all the more, and with a yell like that of a pack of savages, they dashed into the dark recesses of the cave, whither Dan had fled as soon as he fired his last shot.

He did not run far, however, before he ran up against a solid wall which brought him to an abrupt standstill.

He naturally thought this was the end of the

cave, but feeling hastily along the wall, he found that there was a passage around two sides of the impediment; in other words, it was a point where the two passages diverged.

Taking the left hand road he took a few steps along it, when he discovered that there was a recess in the wall just large enough for him to stand in, so he stepped into it and stood there awaiting the coming of the gang.

On dashed the gang, and, like Dan, ran into the solid wall or partition, and piled up on top of each other.

With a series of execrations they recovered themselves after a little, and creeping round the wall to the right, dashed ahead.

This left Dan free to escape from the cave if he chose, and he considered it the wisest thing he could do, as they would come back sooner or later, and set about looking for him.

Dan had no more than made up his mind to this end when he proceeded to carry it out, and started on a run for the entrance of the cave.

As he was going toward the entrance he could see fairly well where he was going, and made good progress.

A sharp run of two or three minutes brought him to the mouth of the cave, and he was about to make his escape, when Captain Foxen slipped out of a niche and confronted him with a pair of pistols.

So sudden and unexpected was the captain's appearance that Dan had no time to draw his revolver until the other's weapons were right in his face.

"Ha! ha!" laughed Foxen. "Now let me see how you like holding up your hands, young man!"

In his excitement he had forgotten to use his assumed slang.

Dan did not raise his hands, though, but instead, looked the gambler square in the face for a moment, and then said:

"So you think you've got the drop on me, do you, Donald Foxen?"

This was a surprise for the captain.

He imagined that nobody there knew who he really was.

The shock was so great that he instinctively lowered his pistols for an instant, and that was what Dan was figuring on.

No sooner did the gambler waver in his purpose, when, quicker than the wink of an eye the young marksman had his own weapons leveled on his enemy.

"Perhaps it would be better the other way, captain," suggested Dan, coolly. "Just see how quick you can drop those pistols and put up your hands! You know I never miss my mark!"

"Curse you!" growled the gambler, dropping his pistols and raising his hands above his head. "Now, what do you want?"

"I want you to accompany me to the nearest town where there is a marshal, so that I can give you up."

"What for?" growled the other, glancing toward the interior of the cave in the evident hope that his gang would soon return and rescue him.

"It is not necessary to explain now. You know and we have no time to talk. Come!"

The captain cast another despairing glance in the direction his men had gone, and not seeing anything of them, began slowly and reluctantly moving away with the young man.

"Come, move a little faster!" commanded Dan, peremptorily, at the same time putting his pistols a little closer to the face of the discomfited captain.

The gambler evidently thought his time had come, for he began to walk at a hurried step.

In another minute they would have been clear of the cave, but just then a deafening yell announced the rapid approach of the gang.

Dan saw that it was all up with him unless he could get his prisoner into the cabin so that he could guard him and use the walls as a fort, and he began to urge him to greater speed.

But the captain, on the other hand, was aware that his only salvation lay in delay.

So, in spite of the young man's threats, he began to lag slower and slower, while the gang were rapidly gaining on them.

The young sport had just got beyond the entrance of the cave, and seeing that it was daylight, began to hope that he could succeed in his plan, when a renewed yell told him that the ruffians were within a few feet of him.

Dan now saw that his scheme was a failure, and the only thing left him was to save his own life.

So, without paying any more attention to his prisoner, he took to his heels and ran for the hut with all the speed in his power.

Dan was a good runner, among his other accomplishments, and went over the ground like a deer, but the gang had good runners among them too, and were soon close upon his heels.

The sport managed to keep away from the fleetest, however, and after a five minutes' sprint, reached the hut and dashed inside and closed the door and fastened it on the inside.

He had no sooner done so, when he poked his pistols out of a couple of port-holes near the door which had evidently been made for that purpose, and awaited the coming of the gang.

He had not long to wait.

Scarcely had he got in position when the foremost dashed up to the door and attempted to open it.

Without a word of warning, Dan let him have it and broke his arm.

The fellow dropped his pistol, threw up his arms and began to yell as though he had been shot through the body.

By that time the rest of the gang had arrived on the spot and a lively skirmish then ensued.

Of course they could do the young man inside no harm by their firing, but they kept it up just the same, while he was fetching a man to the ground wounded with every shot.

This state of affairs lasted but a few minutes, though, for Dan's ammunition gave out and he was compelled to stop firing.

The gang seemed to realize this fact instantly, for they uttered a wild yell and began trying to batter the door down, but that door was of stern wood, and resisted their best efforts for a long time, until, at length, a happy thought struck one of the crowd, and he soon brought a heavy stick.

Four of them grasped this and began to use it as a battering-ram.

The door could not hold out against this, and after several heavy strokes from the improvised catapult, the door yielded and came down with a crash.

Dan saw that further resistance was vain.

The numbers were too great for him, his pistols were unloaded and there was no escape from the shanty.

The now furious ruffians rushed in and seizing the defenseless young man soon had him bound hand and foot and tied to a tree outside the hut.

CHAPTER XIV.

A CLOSE CALL.

AS soon as the rascals had Dan securely bound to the tree, they busied themselves with looking after their wounded and ascertaining how much damage the young fellow had done them.

It was not long before those in charge of the enterprise were ready to report, and when their report came in to the captain, that individual was astonished and disgusted.

Two men had been killed outright and eight had received wounds of various descriptions.

"This is a purty state o' things!" roared the captain. "The idea of the Mississippi Rangers, who prides themselves on bein' the toughest gang on the river, allowin' a mere striplin' to do them up in that style!"

"But," interposed old Pink, who was carrying one arm in a sling, "you fergit thet he's the crack shot o' the kinty, 'sides, we've got him now, tight enough."

"Yes, ye've got him now," growled the captain. "But yer oughter had 'im afore he done all this. If it hadn't been fer thet girl-bearded young Crisp thet begged fer his life, I'd 'a' slit his wizen afore I throwd him overboard, and then we'd 'a' been dead shore thet he'd 'a' never swum outen the Big Muddy."

"Thet's whut kims of hev'in' sich milk-sops round ye, cap'n," said old Pink. "In my 'pin-ion, the bes' thing ye kin do is ter slit Crisp's wizen afore he does any more damage."

"Cain't do it. Wisht I c'u'd."

"Why not, cap'n?"

"I owe the young feller an obligation, and Cap'n Foxen was never know'd to go back on er friend as done him a favor."

"Whut did he do, cap'n?"

"Saved my life when every durned coyote o' the gang hed run off and left me in the hands o' the Vigilantes, thet's whut he done!"

"Oh, thet was jest 'cause he didn't like ter see bloodshed," interposed old Pink.

"It don't make no difference whut it was fer, he saved my life, and I ain't goin' back onto him now!"

"But he's a traitor, cap'n," suggested another.

"I don't b'lieve it."

"Pink saw him takin' grub to the young chap."

"Thet's nothin'. Crisp w'u'd take grub to the

"Will if he tho't the old man was hungry. Jist the same he'd turn round and fight him the next minit."

"But," pleaded Pink, "he was a-givin' 'way the secrets o' the gang to the young chap."

"Eh?"

"Thet's straight," and old Pink chuckled at the effect of his announcement.

He hated the young man who had assisted Dan, and now thought he had the captain influenced in his own favor sufficiently to turn him against Crisp.

Seeing his apparent advantage, the wily old Pink followed it up.

"And, cap'n, it was him as give the pistols to the young feller, whut he used ter kill two of our best men and wound eight more with."

"Sure?"

"Seen him with my own eyes," and Pink chuckled again.

He was sure now that he had it all his own way, but was silent and watched the captain's face.

Finally, seeing that the captain was not likely to say anything, the old fox continued:

"Whut's yer orders, cap'n?"

The captain had evidently been musing, for when Pink spoke he started as though he had been awakened out of a sleep.

"Eh?" he said.

"I say whut's yer orders?" repeated the other.

"Shoot him to death at midnight!" was the peremptory command.

Pink chuckled gleefully, but to make certain that he had not mistaken the captain's meaning, he asked:

"Who, Crisp, cap'n?"

"Crisp? No!" he thundered, turning upon the now cringing old man with a black scowl. "If yer hint sich a thing ag'in I'll make you the victim. It's Dead-Shot Dan, I mean. Shoot him where he stands, there, tied to the tree, as long as there's a piece big enough fer a rope to cover!"

"All right, cap'n!" answered the old man meekly, and bowing submissively, took himself off.

All this dialogue had taken place within twenty paces of where the River Sport was lashed to the tree, and he could not avoid hearing every word of it.

Still he did not lose his courage nor wince.

After Pink had disappeared, the Frisco Sharp turned and gazed for several minutes at the young man bound to the tree, in silence.

Finally he approached him and again looked him over critically.

"I suppose you overheard the conversation, did you not?" he asked in a taunting voice.

"I did," was Dan's cool rejoinder.

"Well, what have you to say?"

"Nothing. It is just what I should expect from a lot of cowards like you and your gang!"

Foxen bit his lips.

"Take care, young man!" he growled. "How can you expect mercy after such talk as that?"

"Who asked you for mercy, Donald Foxen?" retorted the young man, bitterly. "I should as soon expect mercy or justice from an Apache as from you or your wolves."

Foxen saw that it was no use to try to placate him, so he changed his tone.

"So, Crisp told you the secrets of the clan, did he?" he demanded, in a jeering tone.

"That is my business!" retorted the other, sternly.

"Good! Well, I happen to know that he did, otherwise you could never have known who I am. But, that makes no difference now. Suppose I should let you go, would you divulge the secrets you have learned and bring the officers of the law down on me?"

"Yes!" and the young man's word was spoken with vim.

"You would not, in consideration of your life, keep my secrets?"

"No!"

"Did you not hear me refuse to prosecute Crisp just now after hearing that he had betrayed me, simply because he had once saved my life?"

"Yes, and the only feeling of admiration I ever experienced for you was aroused by that sentiment. I confess that I did not believe you capable of anything half so noble."

"Why, then, cannot you act the same noble part, and promise to keep my secret in gratitude for having spared your life?"

"Because, in the first place you have no intention of sparing my life: and if you had, it would only be for the selfish end of having me keep your accursed secrets. The cases are entirely

different. When the young man saved your life, and purchased your gratitude, he did it out of pure goodness of heart, just as he did when he saved my life last night, and, as you said awhile ago, as he would do to the devil."

Foxen laughed and lapsed into silence.

After a little while he said:

"I admire your bravery, young man, and almost love you for saying that you admired me for one little act of my life. It was the only genuine expression of sympathy I have received for years. I am flattered by the cringing crew who have axes to grind, but you, having nothing to gain, expressed an honest opinion that went to my heart. I wish to God I could save you! I wish I dared to trust you!"

And without another word, the bandit chief strode away.

From that time on the young man was left alone with his own gloomy thoughts, with the prospect of nothing more cheerful than death before him.

No one came near him during the whole long, tedious day. But near dusk old Pink appeared with a bowl of bread and milk which greatly refreshed him.

Time dragged on after the old man left him, and it seemed to him that not only midnight, but the whole night had had time to pass.

But when he looked up at the stars, which were his only companions now, he knew from their position that it still wanted an hour to the time set for his execution.

The outlaws had kept up a continuous din of jollification, in the cabin all night long, but they had suddenly grown quiet, and Dan supposed that they had either gone to sleep or were preparing for his death.

He saw no one stirring, however, and as the time wore on and he saw that midnight was approaching, he had almost begun to hope that the villains had drunk themselves into such a state of stupefaction as to be unable to perform the proposed deed.

At length he saw that it was within a few minutes of midnight and almost at the same moment he heard some one approaching.

At first he almost hoped that it was his friend Crisp coming to rescue him, but as the figure approached nearer, he saw that the person was much larger than Crisp.

He did not stir, and the figure came on up to him, and to his astonishment, began to unbind him.

As soon as this was accomplished, the figure, without having uttered a word, motioned the prisoner to follow him, and put off in the direction of the river. The young man could hardly walk, so weak was he and so stiff were his limbs from the gripping cords, but he managed to stagger on, and in the course of half an hour they reached the river. Here Dan saw that a boat was anchored, and his rescuer stepped in and motioned him to follow the example. Dan did not want a second bidding, and was soon seated in the stern of the skiff.

The mysterious person then grasped the oars and began to pull down the river.

The swift current carried the frail craft along without much effort on the part of the oarsman, and in the course of two hours Dan saw that they were approaching a city.

Before they quite reached it, however, the boatman landed and, stepping ashore, motioned Dan to follow. The latter obeyed, and they struck out from the river and walked for an hour or more through thinly populated streets, which indicated that they were in the suburbs of a city.

Finally they came to a handsome residence surrounded by magnificent grounds, and the man stopped.

Turning to Dan and removing a cap which he had worn over his head ever since he came out to the tree where Dan was tied, the Frisco Sharp began:

"Do you know me, Dan?"

"My God! Donald Foxen!" exclaimed the young man in surprise. "How came you to do this?"

"Ask no questions. As I told you, I love you, and could not see you die. You may betray me, but I will trust you. At least you cannot find the way back to our camp before we move, for your wounds will lay you up for the next week, as mine will me, if they don't kill both of us. I feel that my wounds are fast taking me off, and if I don't get somewhere where I can get medical aid I will be a dead man inside of a week. This is the residence of Casper Desban, the old gentleman whom you befriended on the boat. He will receive you kindly and take care of you. He does not know that you were abducted from the boat, and when you appear he will simply think

that you have come from the boat. You were unconscious when you were taken off, and—"

But the young man heard no more. His weakness had overcome him and he swooned.

Foxen called a couple of the servants of the house and had him carried inside, telling the servants that Dan was from the steamer.

CHAPTER XV.

UNEXPECTED DEVELOPMENTS.

WHEN Dan Louis came to his senses he could not imagine where he was.

He stared about him in bewilderment, but his surroundings were new and strange.

At first he thought he was alone, but as he cast his eyes about the room, he was surprised to see an old lady and a young negress sitting near a window on the opposite side of the apartment, and at the same time he became conscious of an almost overwhelming scent of flowers coming in at the window.

He tried to raise himself, but found, to his surprise and horror, that he was unable to move; and yet, strange to say, he felt no pain.

He had not been conscious long before the old lady noticed it, and, rising, crossed the room to his bedside.

She was a motherly looking woman with a refined and kindly face, and as she approached she smiled.

"Ah, you have awakened," she said, in a gentle voice. "How do you feel, my boy?"

"Very well, thank you," he replied. "Where am I?"

"At home, and among friends," answered the lady.

This answer puzzled him more than ever.

What could she mean by saying that he was at home?

Surely they had not taken him back to New York to the adopted home from which he ran away, years ago, on account of ill-treatment?

And if so, who could this woman be? He had never seen her before.

These thoughts flitted through his brain with the rapidity of lightning, and before he had an opportunity to ask another question, the lady bewildered him still more by stooping down, putting her hand under his head in an affectionate manner and kissing him.

"Thank God, my boy is safe!" she cried, while her tears fell fast and warm upon his face. "We thought he was lost to us forever. But God has restored him to us!"

This was all an enigma to the young man; he could make nothing of it.

And then before he could recover from his surprise, two other persons entered the room.

As his eyes wandered toward them, he was surprised and delighted to see that they were his friends, Mr. Desban and Florence!

Before they approached the bedside Dan noticed that the old gentleman stopped and whispered something to Florence, at which she nodded, and then the two came on in no more demonstrative mood than usual, by which he understood that the old gentleman had advised Florence not to show any enthusiasm, lest it should excite their guest too much in his weak state.

"Well, young man," began Mr. Desban, after he had taken his seat at the bedside. "I am glad to see that you are much better. We were worried about you for a day or two, but the doctor told us this morning that you would come out of your sleep greatly improved."

"Thank you, sir; I do feel very much better, although I seem to be rather weak."

"That is only natural, after what you have undergone; but, good nursing—which you are sure to receive here—will soon bring you out as strong as a lion."

"Tell me," interposed the young man, as soon as he could get an opportunity to speak, "how did it come about? Why did not my friends, the major and old Rusty, come to my rescue?"

"Why, my boy, they were mortally wounded before you arrived on the scene, and have since died, and we feared the same fate for you for awhile, but now, thank God, you are out of danger!"

"But, how did you get away? Did not those fellows try to take you into custody again?"

"No; the fellow you were contending with was the last one of the gang to hold out, and he was so badly wounded that you had scarcely more than fainted when he became unconscious. After that the boat's crew recovered from their panic and put the craft about on her course, and we had no more trouble until we landed at Memphis here. You were taken in charge by the captain of the boat, but he brought you home two days afterward."

"How long have I been here?"

"Two days this afternoon."

"And yet it seems only an hour ago since I was fighting for my life with those villains."

Dan said nothing about his subsequent adventure, out of gratitude to Foxen, for sparing his life.

"A brave fight you made of it, too. Poor little Florence could hardly be restrained from flying to your side, in the thick of it. Brave girl!"

The young man raised his eyes to those of the beautiful girl for an instant, and the color rose to his cheeks. But, he was surprised to see that she only smiled, and something told him that she had none of the feeling for him that he had for her.

For some reason which he could not explain the young man felt a pang of disappointment.

He was silent for some moments, as were all the others, the old lady alone evincing any feeling, which she did by still holding his hand and stroking it.

At length Dan asked:

"And Foxen? What has become of him? I hope I did not injure him fatally."

The mention of the gambler's name, Dan was surprised to see, caused the old lady to start and the color to mount to her cheek.

The old gentleman did not answer at once, but after a period of silence, during which father, mother and daughter exchanged significant looks, he responded:

"I am afraid you are too weak to hear any more at present, my boy. Suppose you sleep awhile, and when you awake again, I have something to tell you."

This announcement was the worst thing he could have done, for it only excited the young man's curiosity, which was more calculated to agitate him than any recital could possibly do.

"Oh, no, sir; I am strong enough to hear anything," he insisted.

"I am afraid not," rejoined the old gentleman.

"But I know I am. Besides, the anxiety you awaken would never allow me to sleep until I have heard what you have to tell."

"What do you think, mother?" asked the old gentleman, addressing his wife. "Do you think he is strong enough to hear it?"

"I cannot see how it can hurt him," she responded. "Besides, I am no less anxious than he is to have it over with."

"Very well, then," continued Mr. Desban. "I will tell you; but you must promise to be calm."

"I will be calm, sir."

"Well, you remember I told you about a man who was my rival for the hand of my wife when I was courting her?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, it turns out that this man Foxen was none other than my old enemy, Edward Thorne!"

"Then, he did not destroy himself, as you had heard?"

"So it seems."

"How did you learn this, sir?"

"Listen, and I will tell you the whole story. The wound you gave the wretch proved fatal. He was brought on to Memphis here, and taken to the hospital two days ago. The same night he sent for me, and I called upon him."

"As soon as I sat down by his bedside he put out his hand and said: 'Desban, can you forgive a dying man?' Then it was that I recognized him as my old enemy. 'Edward Thorne,' I exclaimed, 'is it possible that it is you?' 'Yes,' he replied. 'I thought you were dead,' I remarked. 'So I led you to believe; but it was not true. Would to God it had been so. It would have saved us both a great deal of sorrow. But let by-gones be by-gones. I feel that I have very little time to live, and I have something to communicate before I am silent forever. You remember the child that disappeared from you?' he went on. 'Do I remember it? Can I ever forget it? I cried frantically. 'If I only knew for certain that he was dead—' But here he stopped me. 'Never mind raving over the child now,' he interrupted, bluntly. 'He is not dead; and that is one of the things I was about to tell you.' I was about to break in again, but he checked me as abruptly as before."

"I took the child from you for revenge, as you may know, and at first thought I would make you pay a big ransom and then return it to you; but, later, I made up my mind to have it put out of the way and have an end of it. But, somehow or other, I do not know how it was—possibly I was not quite as depraved as I had given myself credit for being—but the fact is, I did neither. Instead, I sent the boy to some friends of mine, who raised and educated him,

but, as I understood afterward, they treated him so unkindly that he ultimately ran away. I had lost all trace of him, and, like yourself, thought that he might be dead, when one day I ran across a young fellow in San Francisco who had some money and was inclined to play cards. I also learned that he had a case of diamonds which had been presented to him by a gun club in the city for his superior marksmanship, and induced him to let me see it. The moment I saw the name I of course knew who it was, and determined not only to win all his money but also that case of diamonds. I succeeded, or so nearly so that he had but a few dollars left."

"And then it happened that I met you a fortnight afterwards, and as you did not recognize me, I determined upon the scheme which was frustrated by this same young man. My plan was to present the jewels to your daughter, and then have you arrested for stealing them, and use this as a means for blackmailing you. But, as I said, the scheme was a failure!" And here, continued the old gentleman, "the fellow grew too weak to speak further. He answered just one more question, and then expired. I asked him: 'Is this boy—this Dead-Shot Dan—then my son—my long-lost son?' To which he answered in the affirmative. So, my boy, you are our son, and this is your own mother."

At this the old lady, who had been restraining herself with difficulty all this time, gave way to her impulse and clasped her son to her bosom. And she had no sooner released him when his sister embraced him long and passionately.

"Just to think," resumed the father, after they had finished embracing the newly-discovered son, "that it should have been our boy, of all people in the world, that saved our lives!"

"And to think that at one time," rejoined Dan, "I believed you were in league with that rascal! I was quite positive that Florence was."

Florence laughed, and as her eyes met those of her brother, she blushed.

"The funniest thing about it all to me," she said, "is that I was just on the point of falling in love with my own brother!"

"I beat you in that respect, then," rejoined Dan, laughing, "for I was already dead in love with you, sister, and the saddest disappointment of my life was to find that you met me so coldly when you came in, awhile ago."

"That was not my fault. It was in accordance with papa's instructions. He was afraid that any demonstrations on my part would excite you. Forgive me, brother."

"I have nothing to forgive, dear. Indeed, only for the fact that the dear old major and old Rusty are dead, I should be perfectly happy. Are you sure they are dead, father?"

"I can only say that it was so reported to me."

"Wal, then, darn my buttons ef yer can't tell them es reported it that they didn't tell the truth, by a jug-full!" and the old man in the flesh stalked into the room, followed by old Rusty!

"That's true es preachin'," affirmed the latter!

THE END.

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